

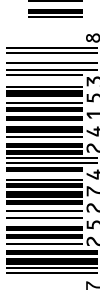
COILHOUSE

A LOVE LETTER TO ALTERNATIVE CULTURE

issue05

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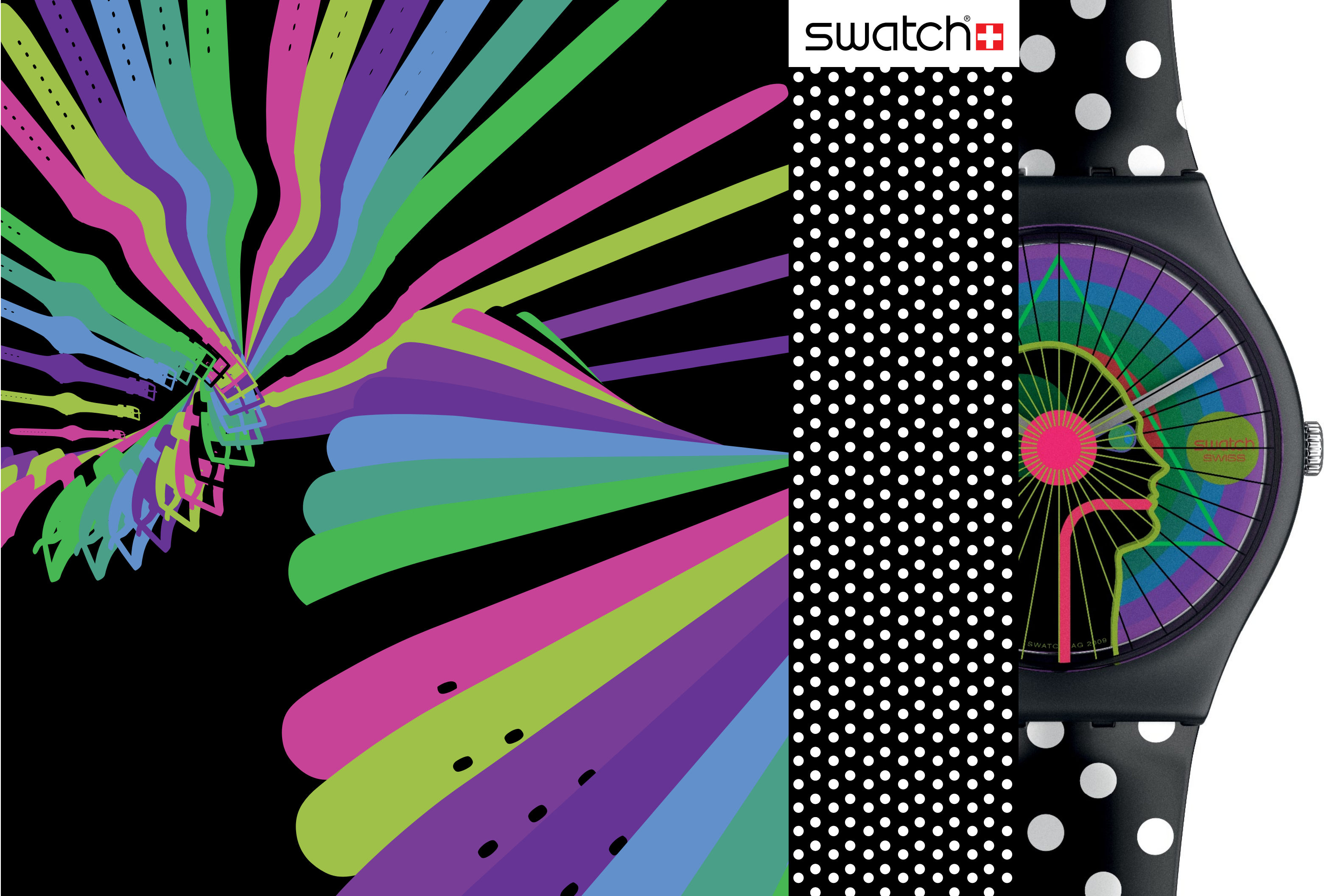
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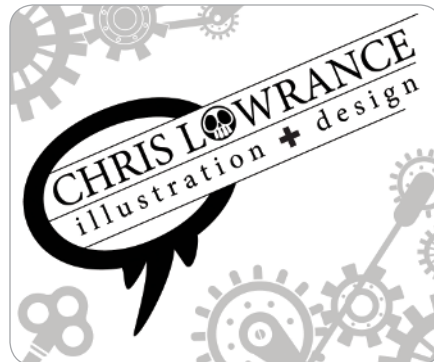
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In loving memory of Gary Gygax & Dave Arneson, Tiffa Novoa, Breanna LeVine, Ronnie James Dio, Frank Frazetta, and Alexander McQueen.

ON THE COVER

Photographer: Ali Mahdavi
Model: Ajuma Nasenyana

Letter from the Editors

It has been, ever so literally, a long, strange journey from the previous issue of Coilhouse to the one you're holding now. Nadya's been ping-ponging from one secret lair to another: Los Angeles, London, Philly, San Francisco. Zoetica got hitched (reportedly honeymooning with her honey on the moon), and moved into a new house. Mer keeps venturing "there and back again" from Oakland to Wellington, New Zealand. Our push toward global domination continues, with Issue #05 contributors hailing from Beijing, London, Lodwar, Bali, and Paris by way of Tehran.

To say that the Internet has aided our international venture would be an understatement. Coilhouse was born on teh world-wide wub and would likely perish without it. For this issue, Mer facilitated and art-directed an ambitious Dorian Gray-themed fashion editorial [page 82] shot in NYC from various Te Aro coffee houses. Zo set up her in-depth interview with Chet Zar [page 60] exclusively via Twitter. Nadya was able to communicate via email and IM with 30+ people, cross-referencing materials for a retrospective on the late, great fashion designer Tiffa Novoa [page 26]. Our Creative Director Courtney, Merch Mistress Gretta, Ad Managers Sam and Allie, and ever-expanding team of writers, photographers and illustrators all coordinated from afar, usually without ever picking up a telephone. And then, there were the Skype conferences calls. Hooo, boy...



Coilhouse International Conference Calls – Sillier than a Stampeding Herd of Redonkulosauruses. An average Issue #05 laptop editorial meeting in a nutshell: mania, sleep deprivation, confusion about what day it was/what time it was/what was on the meeting agenda. Cackling. Grunting. Inappropriate gyrating. Concerned discussion of various failing bodily functions. **Illustrations by Rich Stevens.**

Generally speaking, we always try to be productive, and we succeed, but not without a LOT of poop jokes and detours, which, if you ask us, is a good thing. A big part of what makes this whole endeavor worthwhile and fun for all involved is that we're allowed to get silly together. We couldn't survive this any other way.


In fact, after printing the solemn, ghostly memento mori that was #04, all any of us have wanted to do is revel in being present, tuned in, and turned on to this crazy, colorful, topsy-turvy, chaotic, vibrant thing called LIFE. #05 reflects a Coilhouse family quest for renewal and rejoicing. There's definitely a lot to celebrate this time around. The following pages contain especially gleeful, arty farty fanfares to various luminary artists, writers, musicians, photographers and fashion designers. There's a loving personal memoir about kinship and D&D courtesy of author/actor Wil Wheaton [page 46], and some fascinating discussion of the thriving neo-burlesque movement with Jo "Boobs" Weldon [page 22]. We've produced a lavishly illustrated exposition of 19th century populist fiction from China [page 10], as well a commemoration for the recently defunct, diasporic Austin dance party, Gadjo Disko [page 90]. Heck, there's even a freakin' foldout poster of original art and blingtastic holographic foil involved! It doesn't get more festive than that.

More reasons to boogie down: with #05, the mag's reached the halfway point to double digits. No small feat for an upstart, upscale publication these days! We've finally been able to significantly reduce our cover price in stores, giving a little bit back to everyone who sustained us through our \$15 ~~sated~~ ramen days. Even better, we're more than tripled the number of shops where you can find us, extending Coilhouse Magazine's reach far beyond anyone's modest expectations when we started doing this back in 2007.

Whether you've been along for the entire ride thus far, or just now finding us, welcome, comrades.

Thanks for joining the party.

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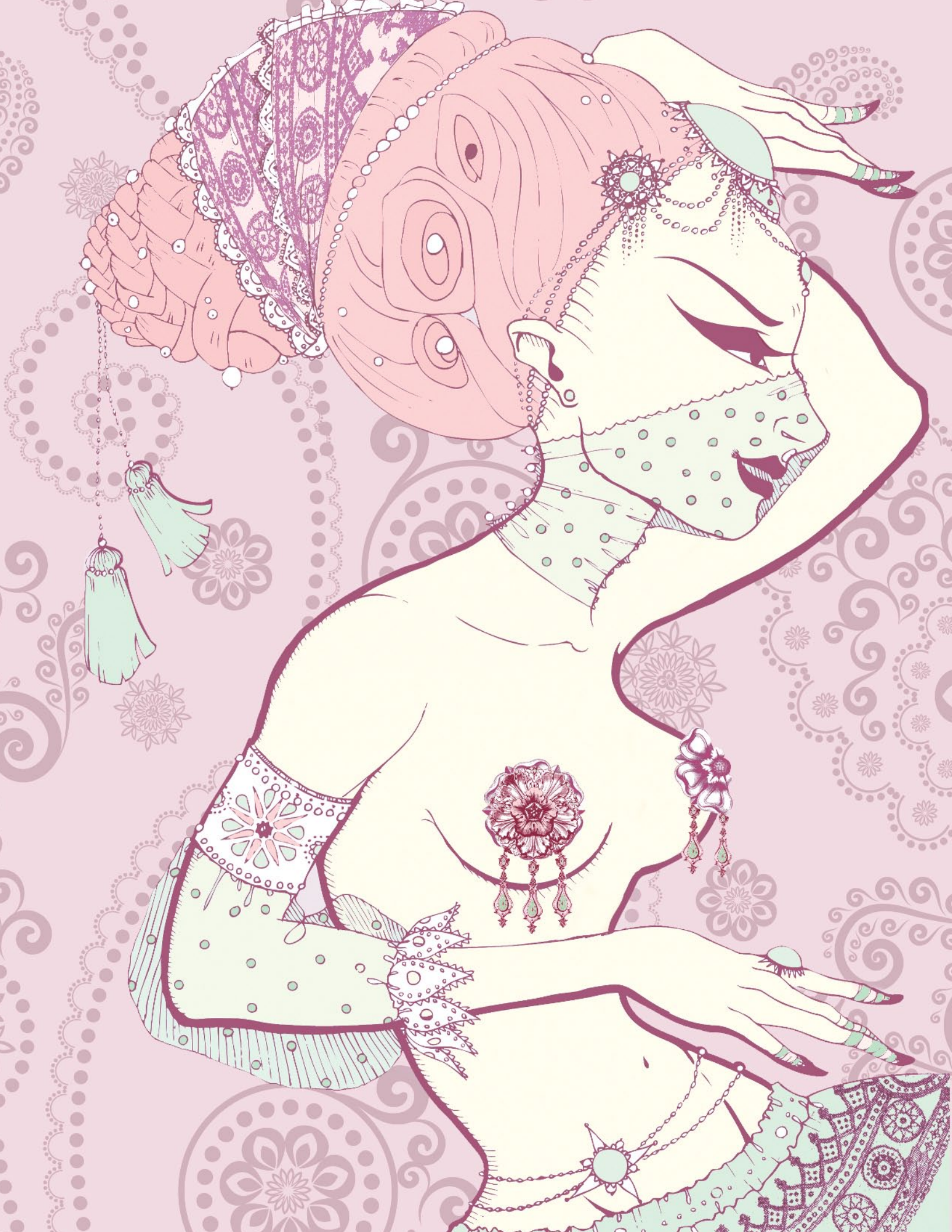
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“We’re so conditioned to all art being archival and no art being ephemeral, when that wasn’t always the case.”

Amanda Palmer, page 16

ILLUSTRATION Zoetica Ebb

Inform

海盗女皇和花血聚会

THE CHINESE INVENTED gunpowder, pasta, tenure, doggie squeeze-toys, rodents as pets – and the pulps. Serialized novels were popular in China hundreds of years before they appeared in the West. The advent of efficient printing technology, as well as the appearance of modern newspapers in China in the 1870s, led to a surge in the production of popular and pulp literature in China at the turn of the twentieth century. Sadly, Chinese popular culture from that time period is almost entirely unknown in the West. One obvious reason for this is a language barrier. Few of the stories, novels, comic strips, and films produced in China before 1950 have ever been translated into English. Secondly, much of it did not survive the Japanese onslaught during the 1930s and 1940s, not to mention the Cultural Revolution. It's a shame, because Chinese popular culture before 1950 was wildly imaginative, memorable, and occasionally predictive of later American pulp fiction.

雷驰马车和电鞭子

GALLOPING THUNDER WAGONS AND ELECTRIC WHIPS

The fantastic and science fictional are a traditional part of Chinese literature and popular culture, dating back to at least the sixth century BC. Fabulously out-of-this-world ideas, from trips to the moon to robot rat-killers, are common. The roots of Chinese science fiction can be traced back to *Quell the Bandits*, written by the scholar Yu Wanchun in 1853. It was a sequel to the classic fourteenth century outlaw novel *The Water Margin*. In *Quell the Bandits*, the rebel bandits hire Baiwaerhan, a white native of Atlantic Europa, to make *benlei che*, “galloping thunder wagons,” three-story assault towers armed with automatic cannons, covered in impenetrable armor, and equipped with spring-powered wheels that allow the wagons to traverse any terrain. *Quell the Bandits* also features land mines, *chenlou zhou* (“underwater clam boats,” or submarines), robot lions, and *feitian shenlei* (“divine flying thunder,” or explosive rockets).

In the 1870s, the rise of the modern Chinese press led to a wide variety of newspaper serials of various genres, including sci-fi. By the end of the century, Chinese readers were accustomed to overtly science fictional stories. *General Nian's Conquest of the West* (1899) was a hit. In the novel, Nan Guotai, the son of Jesuit missionary Ferdinand Verbiest, supplies Tibetan rebels with advanced technology, including *shengtian qiu* (aerial balloons) and *dixing chuan* (underground ships), for use against the Qing empire (the last ruling dynasty of China, in power from 1644 to 1912). The Qing retaliates with traditional Daoist magic, which leads to the Master of Snowy Mountain dueling with the Pope and Chinese troops, using tampons (*yanzhi jin*, or “rouge garments”) to absorb the electricity of the Tibetan rebels' *dianqi bian* (“electric whips”). Yes, you heard correctly. Tampon warfare.

月球殖民地和白色恐怖 MOON COLONIES AND WHITE PERILS

The bloody Boxer Uprising (1899-1901) drove home to the Chinese public – even more than the 1894-1895 war between China and Japan – how militarily weak China was compared to Japan, Russia, and the West. Among the many effects of this culture-wide alarm was an upsurge in science fiction, especially from 1902 – when Jules Verne's work was first translated into Chinese – to 1916, the beginning of the chaotic Warlord Era. Some of this science fiction was innocent, lacking political overtones: Xu Nianci's fanciful novel *A New Account of Mr.*

Absurdity (1905) is about a Chinese man whose soul is separated from his body during a typhoon. He visits Mercury, which is inhabited by brain-transplanting aliens, and Venus, on which evolution takes place at a rapid pace. On the other hand, many sci-fi stories of this era carried outspoken political messages.

Several such stories voiced a deep desire to escape from China and start again elsewhere: Li Boyuan's *Ice Mountains and Snow Seas* (1903), set in 2499, describes how a group of 11,495 Chinese men and women, disgusted with China, leave for a new home in thirteen ships filled with the most advanced technology, from binoculars to wireless telephones. The ships crisscross the seas of the world looking for a suitable spot before they land at the South Pole and find a new colony. The colony becomes famous, and a worldwide emigration of oppressed peoples, including Jews and American blacks, ensues. The South Pole colony becomes a utopia, open only to the oppressed non-whites of the world. A similar piece of escapism appears in Huangjiang Diaosou's *Moon Colony* (1904-1905), in which the scholar Long Menghua flees from Hunan with his wife. Their ship collides with a British liner, and Long's wife disappears during the shipwreck. Long encounters Otaro Tama, a Japanese dirigible inventor, and the two begin looking for Long's wife. They encounter a variety of people, including a group of fierce female martial artists intent on assassinating the Qing hierarchy. Eventually the group decides that all the nations of the world are too corrupt for humans, so they set off in Otaro's dirigible for the moon, where they establish a new utopian country.

More of the stories from this era contain narratives of Chinese conquest of the West, which can be seen as the projection of Chinese resentment of and fury toward the West into fiction. Lu Shi'e's *A New Rustic's Wild Words* (1909), set in the far future, portrays Europe as a Chinese colony. But a group representing the White Peril (basically the same thing as Yellow Peril, only Caucasian) plans to rebel. The Emperor orders Wen Suchen, the general in charge of the European

SHERLOCK HOLMES 福尔摩斯对狐狸精 VS. THE FOX WOMAN A BRIEF TOUR OF CHINESE PULP 二战前中国低俗文化之简介

BY JESS NEVINS

colonies, to suppress the rebellion. Wen leads an armada of flying warships in a rapid, violent tour of the seventy-two European nations before sailing his ships to Jupiter. Jupiter is discovered to be full of animals and plants, and covered with gold, so Wen establishes a colony there, appointing himself as governor. In Biheguan Zhuren's *New Era* (1908), again set in the future, a conflict in Hungary between Chinese immigrant workers and white Hungarians leads the Chinese emperor to seek a military solution to the problem. He turns to Huang Zhisheng, a retired admiral, and makes him commander in chief of the Chinese forces. A global war follows in which both sides use technologically advanced instruments and weaponry, including zeppelins, aerostats, submarines, radar, torpedoes and torpedo detectors, amphibious shoes, high-powered telescopes, and bulletproof and electricity-repelling clothing. The Europeans' use of the "green gas" temporarily stops the Chinese fleet, but the Chinese "balloon brigade" and "soul-penetrating dust" eventually prove to be unstoppable.

海盗女皇和花血聚会

PIRATE QUEENS AND THE FLORAL BLOOD PARTY

Martial artists in Chinese popular fiction go back at least to the fourth century BCE, and *wuxia* (wandering martial artist) novels and plays are a constant throughout Chinese history. *Wuxia* novels were popular in the newspapers and magazines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Just as nineteenth century *wuxia* novels had merged the *wushu* and mystery genres (detective characters like Judge Bao solved crimes assisted by a group of martial artists), some twentieth century *wuxia* novels combined the martial arts and science fiction genres. Haitian Duxiaozi's *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* (1905) told the story of Jin Yaoze, a young Chinese woman who returns to China after three years in the United States. The corruption of the Chinese government infuriates her, so she vows to become a radical, trying and failing twice to assassinate the

Empress Dowager. During her travels she visits a scientific utopia populated only by women and encounters the Floral Blood Party, an all-female group of nihilist assassins.

The warlord era (1916-1928) temporarily interrupted the flow of *wuxia* stories, but the rise of the Chinese film industry in the late 1920s and early 1930s led to a new wave of *wuxia* stories in film. These *wuxia* movies eschewed science fiction and embraced fantasy. Chen Kengran's *The Swordswoman of Huangjiang* (1930) features Fang Yuqin, a swordswoman who wanders the countryside with her brother, helping the innocent and punishing the guilty. Among her exploits is the killing of a giant golden-eyed eagle that is raiding a small village. Zheng Jidou's *Pirate Queen* (1931) features a female pirate in the early nineteenth century who uses her martial arts abilities and magical powers to take command of a fleet of pirate ships and defeat Chinese pirates and then the British navy.

每支玫瑰都有她扎人的刺

EVERY ROSE HAS HER MAN-KILLING THORNS

Gender bending lurked beneath the surface of Chinese popular culture in the nineteenth century but became more open and obvious after the establishment of the Chinese republic in 1911. In Yu Tianfen's *The Lady of the Roses* (1924), a young woman who is selling roses at a newly opened entertainment park is suspected of involvement in several crimes. The patrolling policemen investigate her but are beguiled by her charms and share an assignation with her. But at length the woman is revealed to be the criminal behind the thefts, a major player in the underworld, and a man dressing as a woman to allay suspicion.

Transgressions of gender were particularly common in martial arts films. The female lead of Yao Minai's *The Highwayman of Shandong* (1925-1926) is a peasant in a part of Shandong that is plagued by a fierce bandit chief. The deadly peasant puts on male clothes and

defeats the bandits with her martial arts skills, meanwhile becoming part of a love triangle with a man she loves and a woman in love with her male persona. In Zhang Huimin's 1929 film *The Female Knight Errant White Rose*, Bai Suying is a top student at the Women's Sports Academy. Bai receives a letter from her father informing her that their family farm has been the target of local bandits. Bai puts on a male disguise, including a cowboy hat and a mustache, and goes to the farm, taking a bow and a sword with her. She pretends to be Bai Tiemin, her sickly brother, and defeats the bandits in combat.

每支玫瑰都有她扎人的刺
NOTHING IS MORE LIKE A
PULP THAN REAL LIFE

Women were common as protagonists in Chinese pulps – unusually so, compared to Western pulps. The figure of the *nüxia* – the female wandering knight errant, as butt-kickingly fearsome as her male counterpart, the *wuxia* – goes back centuries, but this character became more common in the twentieth century, not least because of the rise of feminism in China in the mid-1890s and the large number of women involved in the political and social reform movements of the 1890s and 1900s, and the smaller but still significant number of women who embraced revolutionary ideals before, during, and after the 1911 establishment of the Chinese Republic. Some of these women led adventurous lives and became the popular embodiments of the "girl on the threshold," the heroic, courageous, self-sacrificing woman who so excited Chinese intellectuals during these years. And, like in the "celebrity pulps" of the Western pulp stories that featured celebrities engaged in adventures as themselves, some of these women were used as protagonists in Chinese celebrity pulps.

The use of real people in adventure stories is a tradition in Chinese popular fiction that dates back at least to the thirteenth century, but the development of the modern mass media in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gave Chinese writers many more examples of real people to use in fiction. The traditional figures of judges and monks were used in the pulps: Li Peng-heng (?-1900) was a judge known for his rectitude, and in 1902 he appeared as Li Ch'ih-chün in Chung Hui's *The Cases of Judge Li*. Li Ch'ih-chün is a wandering judge who fights evil and corruption while accompanied by a group of faithful *wuxia* and *nüxia*. Less traditional individuals were also featured, especially women. Sophia Perovskaya (1854-1881) was a Russian revolutionary anarchist who took part in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. In 1902 Perovskaya appeared in Luo Pu's serial "Female Heroes of Eastern Europe" (1902-1903), which portrays her as a heroic fighter against despotism. The fictional Perovskaya organizes factory strikes in the Urals, recruits new members for her political party, survives exile to Crimea, and eventually escapes from jail. (The American equivalent might be a pulp featuring Lee Harvey Oswald as a hero.) More famous was the case of Shi Jianqiao (1904-1979).

Shi was a Chinese activist whose father, army officer Shi Congbin, was captured and murdered in 1925 by the

雷驰马车和电鞭子

“EVENTUALLY THE GROUP DECIDES THAT ALL THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD ARE TOO CORRUPT FOR HUMANS, SO THEY SET OFF IN OTARŌ'S DIRIGIBLE FOR THE MOON, WHERE THEY ESTABLISH A NEW UTOPIAN COUNTRY.”

warlord Sun Chuanfang. In 1935, while Sun knelt in prayer at a Buddhist temple in Tianjin, Shi Jianqiao shot Sun twice in the head and once in the body, then asked the monks to call the police. Shi's act of filial revenge became a *cause célèbre* in China, and she was sentenced to only seven years (and later pardoned) because of the “mitigating circumstances deserving of judicial compassion.” Shi appeared in the newspaper serial “The Avenging Daughter” (1935-1936) as a *nǚxia* who uses her martial arts skills to avenge the death of her father by killing Sun, who (in the serial) was a sworn brother to Shi Congbin.

尖叫，1939年的香港风格 SCREAM, 1939 CHINESE STYLE

The influx of American horror movies, and the real-life horrors of the Japanese invasion and occupation, spurred the creation of the Chinese horror film industry. The first Chinese horror film was Yeung Kung Leong's *The Midnight Vampire* (1936), in which a man, murdered by his brother over an inheritance fight, comes back as a vampire to kill his murderer. But the film responsible for starting the Chinese horror craze was Ma Xu Weibang's *Song at Midnight* (1937), a remake of *Phantom of the Opera* with an anti-feudalism, anti-warlord spin. *Song at Midnight*'s success led to the rise in horror's popularity, both in published works and in movies. The year 1939 was the genre's high-water mark, when numerous films flooded the market. A typical movie, both in its approach to the genre and its treatment of gender politics, is *The Three-Thousand-Year-Old Vampire* (1939), in which a female vampire, 3,000 years old but still beautiful, rules a subterranean kingdom full of demons and sends them up to the surface world to terrorize humanity and gather her victims. Another such lurid tale is Leong Wai-man's *Vampires of the Haunted Mansion* (1939), in which a group of beautiful young women roam the streets of Hong Kong at night attacking innocent, unwary men and draining their blood.

More memorable was Wang Fuqing's *The Lady Ghost* (1939) and *The Lady Ghost Part Two* (1939). In the first, a man and his daughter are murdered, leaving his wife to mourn. She vows vengeance, and to achieve it she goes to a cemetery of unmarked graves and lies in a coffin for 49 days to attain the powers of a ghost. This achieved, the woman uses her new powers to find and kill the man who murdered her daughter and her husband, and then she gives herself up to the police. In the sequel, an adulterous wife and her lover attempt to Gaslight the wife's husband. Her lover even attempts to rape the husband's daughter (by a previous marriage). To save the husband and daughter, the man's servant summons Lady Ghost, who promptly kills both the wife and her lover.

The films became so numerous that some directors began making movies that commented on the horror genre itself. Wong Toi's *The Ghost Catcher* (1939) is about Zhong Kui, an eccentric, aging, crotchety “ghost catcher” who makes a living by traveling from town to town catching bothersome or evil ghosts and demons with the help of a magic sword and sack. In *The Ghost Catcher*, the demons he catches had appeared in previous films, including the Coffin Ghost, from Yeung Tin-lok's *Spirit of the Coffin* (1939), and the Spirit of the Broom, from Wang Fuqing's *The Spirit of the Broom* (1939).

上海的炼狱嬉闹 TOPPER IN SHANGHAI

Ma Xu Weibang's remake of *Phantom of the Opera* was not the only Chinese remake of a Western film. Remaking stories involving Western popular culture began in China in the 1880s as imports of Western novels flooded China. By 1900 remakes were common. Captain Nemo was remade as the anti-Qing, anti-Western Li Meng. Louis Feuillade's Irma Vep, from *Les Vampires* (1915), was remade as Red Beauty, a seducer and kidnaper of young men in Shanghai. (Red Beauty is eventually defeated by a *nǚxia*.) Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* was remade as *Spray of Plum Blossoms* (1931), set in Guangzhou in the 1920s and portraying the love affair between an army officer turned heroic bandit and the daughter of a general. Wang Cilong's *The Adventures of the Chinese Tarzan* (1939) tells the story of a Chinese boy raised by apes in Africa. And Yeung Kung Leong's *Charlie Meets the Spectres* (1939) remakes *Topper*, with Charlie, a hapless Chinese man in modern day Shanghai who is befriended by a pair of mischievous ghosts.

The most popular Western character to be remade was Sherlock Holmes. Introduced into China in 1896, the Holmes stories were immediately popular and immediately pirated, and during the next twenty years, hundreds of Holmes pastiches appeared in a variety of magazines, plays, and operas. These Holmes pastiches were known as *Fuermosi*, the Mandarin name by which Holmes is still known in China. (So influential was Holmes that a prominent 1920s Shanghai tabloid was entitled *Fuermosi*.) The *Fuermosi* did not take on ordinary human criminals but creatures from traditional Chinese mythology, including ghosts, fairies, tiger men, and fox women.

The culmination of the *Fuermosi* dynamic came in 1914, when Cheng Xiaoqing began writing his Huo Sang stories. Huo Sang began as an overt Holmes lift but took on a life of his own and appeared in dozens of stories and novels through 1949. Huo Sang remains Holmesian (and according to Cheng's stories is friends with Holmes) but is active in Shanghai, repeatedly duels with Hairy Lion and his Five Blessings Gang, has a contact in the underworld, and dresses in Western-style suits and ties.

And just as Holmes dueled with Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin in *Arsène Lupin Versus Sherlock Holmes* (1906-1907), so did Huo Sang end up jousting with a Chinese master thief. Sun Liaohong created Lu Ping as a pastiche of Arsène Lupin, but Lu Ping was written skillfully enough to take on a life of his own. Lu is nonchalant about everything. He whistles while he burgles; he mutters wisecracks and asides to the reader in a snappy, hard-boiled American patois; and he disguises himself as any of a dozen identities. Lu is owed favors from the vast Shanghai underground and from men and women of every walk of life. The police rarely if ever pose Lu any difficulty; he's just too damn good at wriggling out of dilemmas and difficulties. Though charming, Lu lacks Arsène Lupin's sense of honor and chivalric righteousness, and steals only to relieve his own poverty. On occasion, however, Lu performs a bit of detection and crime-solving, and even takes on enemies of China, such as the Blue Rattlesnake, a Japanese femme fatale and spy.

The Japanese invasions of the 1930s, followed by World War II, and finally the Cultural Revolution, halted the production of Chinese pulp. Hong Kong continued to produce gloriously over-the-top books and films, but what appeared in the People's Republic of China was largely tedious Communist fare, with only the occasional Chinese James Bond novel or *wǔxia* film to provide pulp thrills. However, the increasing capitalization of China over the past twenty years and its leadership's new imperialism have been changing the cultural landscape once again. Soon enough, Westerners may have the chance to read new tales of China conquering the world... maybe even the moon.

Holmes/Fox Woman illustration by Paul Tobin
Robotic Lion & Warrior, Galloping Thunder Wagon and
Otarō's Airship illustrations by Greg Broadmore

On New Year's Eve 2009, the jetsetting, punk cabaret force of nature known as Amanda "Fucking" Palmer joined the Boston Pops Orchestra for the second year running to perform both her Dresden Dolls and solo material as arranged for full chamber ensemble. At some point after her passionate ravishing of the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 and before the last champagne cork was popped, Palmer's boyfriend, eminent, award-winning author Neil Gaiman, proposed to her. And so – in a flood of bubbly, smooching, and Twitter posts – there was much rejoicing. They publicly announced their engagement on January 15. A day later, the lovebirds met up with Coilhouse staff photographer Allan Amato in New York City to pose for this series of playful yet timeless photographs.

Fast-forward several months: after an intensive, season-long stint of touring and traveling separately, the power couple reunited for a brief interlude in Wellington, New Zealand. Jean Sargent joined them over morning coffee at the Copthorne Hotel to discuss, among other things, the whirlwind nature of their creative and personal life together, Xena swordsmiths, Polish sushi, archival versus ephemeral art, and horny koalas.

INTRO BY MEREDITH YAYANOS
INTERVIEW BY JEAN SERGENT
PHOTOS BY ALLAN AMATO
HAIR BY LINH NGUYEN
MAKEUP BY JAMES VINCENT
WARDROBE STYLIST BEAGY ZIELINSKI

AMANDA PALMER & NEIL GAIMAN

Good morning, and welcome to Wellington. Are you enjoying the city so far?

Palmer: I have had a shitty couple of days. But the last time I was in Wellington, I remember walking around thinking this is *such* a beautiful city. I wish I had more time to spend here. My shows here have always been really good ... and I'm planning on coming back to Australia [at some point] next year, during the winter months.

Neil, is this your first time in Wellington, or have you been here before?

Gaiman: It's my second time in Wellington. I was here twelve years ago for about three days for a science fiction convention, which I spent in a hotel, occasionally crossing the street to a café across the road from the hotel, and during one *incredibly* exciting time, going to the museum. This time, I had a spare day before Amanda got here. I got to have lunch with my friend [film director] Guillermo del Toro, which was nice. He's out here for *The Hobbit*. Then I got an amazing tour from Richard Taylor at Weta Workshop. I got the secret "put-away-your-cameras-and-tell-nobody-anything-you-see" tour, which was wonderful, and met the person who had made my assistant's Xena sword. That was wonderfully strange, fantastic, when they talked about having made every sword from *Xena: Warrior Princess* onward, [thinking] "my assistant actually has a full-sized Xena prop, and this is the man who made it."

Congratulations on your engagement. How exciting! You crazy kids and your long-distance relationship. How does it work? How do you make it go?

Gaiman: We don't know. We're still figuring it out, and it's going okay. [Lately] it's definitely felt like watching a plane refuel in midair. It's not even feeling like we come to a rest ... we match velocities and speeds and zoom along together for a bit. We zoom along together for a couple of days in New Zealand; we zoom along together in Poland for three days, and then I leave for the Philippines, and Amanda goes to play Christchurch and Auckland.

When will you have your next period of respite and hanging out?
Gaiman: Sometime in May. It's very sad. We've got to put together a [proper] holiday. It was easier last year. Last year had sort of a sound wave pattern: we'd be doing stuff separately, and then we'd get back together, and it would occur pretty much monthly. We'd be able to grab, comfortably, about four days in each month, which was *kind of* enough if we had them intensely. This year Amanda's about to go out with Jason Webley with [their musical performance art project] Evelyn Evelyn. She's going to be busy doing that, even when I next catch up with her.

Do you enjoy that aspect of your lives: meeting up in faraway places like this where you've got separate appearances and gigs? Going to see each other in front of a crowd?

Palmer: Usually. It really depends. The thing that's so difficult in general about this kind of lifestyle is that you can't plan to match your mood to your movement. When you add a relationship on top of that, it becomes doubly so, because you have to match your mood to the movement to the fact that this chunk of [allotted] time, you're going to be alone – this chunk of time you're going to spend together. I'm so used to being able to do what I want, when

I want, within the annoying structures of my life as it is, that it can be really hard. It was bittersweet to go see Neil yesterday, because he was wonderful; he did this gig at the Town Hall, but I didn't get to be [alone] with him. It's negotiable, like everything else.

You got to know one another while collaborating on a book of photos and essays called *Who Killed Amanda Palmer*. More recently, you worked together on a short silent film called *Statuesque*, directed by Neil and starring Amanda. What is your collaboration process like?

Gaiman: Amanda and I first started emailing each other way before we'd ever met or spoken. At some point in one of the emails, she mentioned that she had been a human statue, and I said, "That's weird. I just wrote a story about a human statue." I sent it to her – a wee, creepy story called *Feminine Endings*. [A while later] we did this benefit for Housing Works [an independent bookstore in NYC]. The day before, I'd been asked if I wanted to make an eight-minute silent film. So I read *Feminine Endings* as part of the Q&A at this benefit.

Amanda and I started talking about human statues and riffing on them. At some point, I said something to the effect of "I wonder if human statues have fans. I wonder if there are human statue spotters like there are bird spotters who go around trying to collect them." And suddenly I had the idea for *Statuesque*. I pulled out my notebook and did something I don't think I've ever done before or since, which is look at an audience of six hundred people and say, "Can you hold on for a minute? I have to write something down." The last thing you're ever meant to do is ask your wife or girlfriend or significant other to work with you, but for *Statuesque*, it was

“It’s definitely felt like watching a plane refuel in mid air. It’s not even feeling like we come to a rest... We match velocities and speeds AND ZOOM ALONG TOGETHER FOR A BIT.”

so obvious that I wanted Amanda, who had actually inspired this and been there. I knew that she'd be fabulous. One of the other ingredients for *Statuesque* was watching the [live video] streaming, a year ago or less, of *The Needle That Sings in Her Heart*, a wonderful Neutral Milk Hotel/Anne Frank musical that she directed [with a group of Lexington High School students]. It was the week of my dad's funeral. I was in England watching it at two o'clock in the morning English time, and staying up late to stare at this tiny little screen. There was this bit at the end where Amanda came on and did this little Death/Waiter/Buster Keaton bit, and I thought, "Oh my god, she can do that! She can do the acting." That's how it came across, so I already had it in my head. So really, the only clever thing that I did was cast her knowing that she would be amazing – and she was amazing – and she had Bill Nighy to act against. The combination of the two made the movie very good.

It's not your music in the film, is it, Amanda?

Palmer: No, it's Sxip Shirey, who I introduced to Neil. He's a friend of mine who is a circus composer. He used to be in [the anarchic traveling circus] Bindlestiff and composed live circus music, so he's great for making silent stuff.

Gaiman: After our first date back in January of a year ago, we had a slight communication breakdown. She thought that when she'd said she was going off for a month now and would be back in touch, she meant she was going off for a month now and would be back in touch. Whereas I thought that she meant that was very nice and she never wanted to see me again. So I got in my car and drove to Florida (as one does). The problem was, my iPod kept throwing on Amanda. Just any kind of random shuffle, any kind of playlist; it would be Amanda all the way. So I [shut down] the iPod. The only other thing I had was Sxip's CD, which he'd given to me two days before [...] in New York. I put it on. I played that CD probably fifteen times during the rest of the drive to Florida, and kept thinking this would make amazing movie music. It would make amazing *silent* movie music. So when I was looking at who to get to do the music for *Statuesque*, I contacted Sxip: "Have you ever had any interest in doing music for silent movies?" He said, "I do them live! I do a thing where they show silent movies and I do all the music and the sound effects."

So I got to collaborate with Sxip.

You both have very open relationships with your fans, which is a very cool thing.

Gaiman: [grins at Palmer] They can see other authors.

Palmer: [grinning back] They let us see other fans. I can see Neil's fans. He can see my fans. They don't come after each other with hatchets.

Gaiman: I was going to say that I didn't mind if they saw other authors.

Has there been a positive experience of interacting with each other's fans who aren't necessarily familiar with the other's work?

Gaiman: I think there was probably already about a thirty percent crossover who loved my stuff and loved her stuff. Beyond that there's probably another thirty percent in each of our fandoms that has discovered the other one. Then there are probably some of them who are baffled, which is fine. Nobody's expecting them to "get" everything. Then you have the weird sort of fringe, out on the edge: "How could he love her?! One day he was going to see me at a signing and our eyes would meet across a crowded room, and he would be mine!" Or young women going, "One day Amanda was going to see me across a crowded room and I was going to ask her a question so profound that she would've realized that we were fated to be together!" So they're a bit grumpy.

Palmer: It's interesting; at your gig yesterday, one of the things I actually realized is I can't really relate to Neil Gaiman fans. Because I'm not a Neil Gaiman fan; I'm a Neil fan. I'm a fan of the man. It wasn't that I wasn't a fan of his work because I didn't like it; I just wasn't familiar with it. When I met Neil, he was Neil Gaiman *the idea* – this guy I knew about, but I hadn't read his work.

Gaiman: Which was great.

Palmer: Since meeting him, of course, I've been slowly catching up and getting to know his stuff, which is great. But also [...] I think being a music fan is different because it's very easy to catch up with and access what it is that I've done, more or less. Sometimes I sit in a room full of people who are Neil Gaiman fans and I feel like a complete alien because they know a bunch of stuff about Neil that I don't know. They have a kind of relationship with him [through] access to his work, whereas I actually know the human being. They feel like totally separate things, so I'm sitting looking at the guy onstage, seeing something completely different. That's wonderful in a way, and in another way really disorienting because I also look around at the room of his fans and think, "Oh my god, they're a bunch of adults ..."

Gaiman: ... and kids!

Palmer: ... and kids. But, you know, it's kind of intimidating. When I look around a room full of my fans, I feel like we're some kind of secret society. I have a feeling that Neil Gaiman fans, at some level, feel the same way, except I haven't been in that society and I probably never will be.

At Neil's Q&A, two of the best questions came from kids.

Gaiman: Came from eight-year-olds! They were wonderful! And I love the fact they stayed and made little comments at the end! One said, "You should be a stand-up comedian!"

Neil, one of your most enduringly popular female characters is Death, from your world-famous, award-winning comic book series *The Sandman*. Everyone loves Death because Death loves everyone. Is there still a *Death: The High Cost of Living* movie in the cards?

Gaiman: There is! That's what I was having the lunch with Guillermo for.

Amanda, do you think you'd be interested in being involved in one of Neil's book-to-movie projects?

Palmer: Yeah. I mean, it depends. I think the danger of me and Neil collaborating is doing anything really directly together. But Neil turning me on to a project or turning me on to work is fine. For us, I think the danger lies in us saying, "Let's create something together." I'd be terrified of creating something from scratch with Neil – you know, something that involves lots and lots and lots of compromise and discussion and hard work at the point where you get to the end of the day and also have to have dinner together and can't stop talking about the thing we were arguing about. That's something I think *any* relationship can do without.



Amanda, you recently wrote and then immediately posted a "song-diary" on YouTube entitled "Gaga, Palmer, Madonna." Do you think you'll continue doing work in a similar vein, where you quickly produce a song and then make it available for instant listener feedback?

Palmer: Yeah. One of the things I'd really like to do over the course of the next few years is tour less, station myself more, and webcast more.

You're engaged, but when do you think you'll get married?

Palmer: We don't know.

Gaiman: We just don't know.

Are you going to move in together sometime soon?

Palmer: I think so. Neil's youngest daughter is still in high school, so he's going to stay with her until she leaves for college, or whatever she decides to do. I know that college isn't the only option. She might want to go join the Ice Capades.

Gaiman: That would be cool.

Palmer: And then after that, I think we'll try shacking up.

Gaiman: We might want to try shacking up a bit before then to make sure it works. I mean, what if you leave the cap off the toothpaste or something?

Do you think you'll combine your bookshelves straight away, or do you think you'll wait and see if books migrate from one person's shelves to another's by themselves?

Gaiman: We have different kinds of bookshelves already, and different kinds of attitudes to bookshelves.

Palmer: Neil has a house ...

Gaiman: ... with a library in it. In fact, with *two* libraries in it!

Palmer: ... so he's already got his books in extreme storage. That's a good question. I always assumed that if I wound up in a long-term relationship, things would be separate anyway, because I need a lot of personal and private space, especially to work. So my guess is, if it's going to be a successful cohabitation, it's going to involve wings. One

wing would be entirely Neil Gaiman, and one wing would be entirely Amanda Palmer, and there will be a wonderful communal space.

Gaiman: No Man's Land!

Palmer: In that communal space there would be a bookshelf of random books that have migrated from either of our spaces onto the shelf, and the random books that people bring over and leave lying around. There'll be all manner of mixing up, I'm sure.

The organic communal bookshelf! Amanda, with Evelyn Evelyn, your project with Jason Webley, I wonder, with the elaborate backstory that you've created for these conjoined twins with a checkered past, do you think of the project as a piece of hoax art, in the tradition of JT Leroy or Fuckart & Pimp? Or was it a purely theatrical idea?

Palmer: I don't know what the fuck you're talking about.

Oh ...

Palmer: No, I'm kidding.

Oh! Okay! You Sunday-morning tease, I've only had half a coffee.

Palmer: You know, the twins are a very complicated part of my life right now. But I'm very, very proud of the record. I think it's an incredible record, and I'm excited to put it out and take them on tour.

Are you touring the twins to Australasia or just to the northern hemisphere?

Palmer: We may tour them here. We're going to see how the tour goes this spring. If that goes well, and Jason wants to come over next year, we may do something like a run at the Adelaide Fringe or do a couple of shows at the Sydney Opera House or something. Evelyn and Evelyn really hate flying, though. As you can imagine, it's really really uncomfortable for [conjoined twins]. The flight is a bitch, even if you're just a single person.

Gaiman: You could lure them to Australia with some conjoined koalas.

Palmer: I saw some koalas in a tree in Adelaide! I was in a recording studio that had a residential apartment, and there were some koalas just sleeping in a tree. Well, actually, the male was sleeping. There was

a big huge tree, and they were on a branch, and the female koala was hanging out at the top of the branch. The male koala had plunked himself down at the bottom of the branch, and I got a long explanation from the rather colorful – read: totally nuts – next-door neighbour of my engineer about how the male koala really, really, *really* wanted to get it on with the female koala, and therefore made her exit from the branch impossible. But she wasn't in the mood. She was just eating and hanging out and waiting for him to go, and the male koala was like, "No, you're not going anywhere unless I get laid." And we watched this drama play out at an excruciatingly slow pace. Koalas are kind of like sloths, you know. They'll sort of go [Amanda does an inspired sloth impression]. Anyway, it was exciting to see koalas in the wild.

Neil, you refer to yourself as a storyteller rather than listing "novelist/comics writer/poet/filmmaker," etcetera. Theatrical minds wish to know: are you a playwright? Will you be?

Gaiman: Yes, I think so. It's definitely on the list of things to do before I die. The nearest I've come to playwriting and play creating in the last decade would probably be the National Theatre of Scotland's musical production of *Wolves in the Walls*, which I co-wrote the book for. I [also] wrote some of the lyrics, and sort of worked intermittently on it. It left me absolutely fascinated with the fact that a theatrical performance *never comes again*. My favorite ever *Wolves in the Walls* was the third preview, where we actually had kids screaming. After that, we wound up cutting some of the stuff that worked incredibly well to terrify kids, because we didn't want to have to clean wee off the seats. I felt like it was never quite as good after that, but there was that once performance that I'll always remember, when the wolf came out and menaced the pig puppet. The kids screamed, and it was just amazing, and I love the fact it only happened that way once.

Palmer: We're so conditioned to all art being archival and no art being ephemeral, when that wasn't always the case ... even in my lifetime as a musician. If something fantastic happens onstage nowadays, I work on the greedy assumption that it's going to be captured. Just ten years ago, with the Dresden Dolls, that wasn't true. It's really interesting because it's changed the nature of performance. The shows aren't ephemeral anymore; they're being completely documented. I now know that a performance of a song I've just written, or something that I'm doing experimentally, is going to have way more to do with, and more impact on, all the people who are watching it on YouTube than [it will] on the club of five hundred people. So my brain is completely split in half, 'cause, yes, there are these five hundred people, but this is gonna be over in five minutes. But that clip on YouTube: if I fuck up this part, it'll stay fucked up forever, and *that's* the clip that everyone's going to watch. [...] You can exercise some degree of control, but not completely, the same way you can exercise some degree of control by asking all your fans, "Can you please not film this?" But, you know, just the fact that you have to do that [means] a performance is no longer a private, intimate gathering of five hundred people. It's like a giant archive wank. I think, with what I do, it can have more pros than cons, but that's not necessarily true for everyone.

It seems quite a nice performative challenge. Even if it's really shitty quality, you can still gain something from an audience recording.

Gaiman: One of the things that fascinates me about watching Amanda's stuff [is that] sometimes it feels more interesting and more honest having one camera in an audience, rather than something with high quality cameras that cut around.

Palmer: YouTube is definitely its own art form. But it's not just that. Even if the picture was television-sized, and the quality was great, and the sound was great – it's still like we've developed a new language of film. It's not like the old language of film. It's more about the *essence* of what was captured on that five minutes of film from this shitty camera, not about general quality. I've compared clips of a song I did at a show that I really wanted to share with fans, and sometimes the clip with the really shitty audio and the terrible picture that happens to be situated in the area of the audience where the audience is actually overpowering the stage sound— *that's* what can really excite you. It's that feeling of "Oh my god, I can actually hear the audience reacting." I can hear them laughing. I can hear them talking. I can hear their breath as something really exciting is happening, and they're all breathing in, and that's what really gets your adrenalin pumping, *not* the fact that it's a fantastic sound-and-lights show. You could give a shit about that, actually. It teaches you something about what people are paying their money for when they buy that ticket. It's not the fucking sound and lights, you know.

It's the feeling and the presence.



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Jo Boobs WAVY WOM!

INTERVIEW
Jeff Wengrofsky

ILLUSTRATIONS OF
NEO-BURLESQUE LUMINARIES
Molly Grabapple

All but her belly
buried in the floor;
And the lewd trounce of a
final muted beat!
We flee her spasm through a fleshless door...
Then you, the burlesque of our lust – and
faith, Lug us back lifeward – bone by infant
bone.
– Hart Crane, “National Winter Garden” (1930)

Jo “Boobs” Weldon is headmistress of the New York School of Burlesque, whose home at The Slipper Room is just a few blocks from where Lydia Thompson’s “London Blondes” first brought burlesque to America, and a stone’s throw from where Minsky’s original National Winter Garden made burlesque part of the American vernacular. Minsky’s notoriously established Gypsy Rose Lee as an icon synonymous with striptease and launched the careers of Abbott and Costello, Phil Silvers, and Robert Alda before being closed in the name of public morality.

Is burlesque, a term that refers to turning things upside down, still able to subvert morals and mores? In a popular culture where the use of sexuality to sell consumer goods is banal, pornography of nearly every stripe is freely and instantly available, and sympathetic gay and lesbian characters are commonplace, is the self-conscious performance of gender merely campy fun or does it still have a liberating capacity?

Can sex work, titillation, gender play, and masturbation undermine heterosexual monogamy? Whose moralities and identities might they challenge?

The scholar Catherine MacKinnon argues that sexualized depictions of women in patriarchal societies reinforce misogyny to the point of constituting a form of violence. Do sexualized performances by women lead to their individual and collective debasement? Is stripping a phenomenon in which women who appeal most to men are degraded whereas burlesque liberates women who stand outside the norms of beauty as prescribed by male desire? Considering stripping and prostitution, I ask whether everyone sells their bodies at every job? Further, when men pay a high premium to be with a woman or just to look at one, whose body is exploited? More specifically, does it make sense to import twentieth century standards of judgment to a twenty-first century United States whose educational system produces more female post-graduates than male and whose career women earn 94.2% of the income of their male counterparts? Despite shifts in income and status, why do so few straight males study burlesque or work as strippers?

Jo Boobs and I met in the basement headquarters of her school on one of the coldest evenings in New England in recent years to explore questions of gender, activism, and whether she and her



ilk are gender traitors or gender busters. The New York School of Burlesque is in sympathetic affiliation with Miss Indigo Blue’s Academy of Burlesque in Seattle and Michelle L’Amour’s Burlesque Finishing School in Chicago, as well as programs in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere. In June 2010, Jo will publish *The Pocket Book of Burlesque* (with a forward by Margaret Cho).

How does burlesque differ from stripping?

To understand the difference, look at it from the audience’s point of view. If someone goes to a strip joint, they usually go in whenever they want, they pick the performer they want, they negotiate how they interact with them, they interact one on one, and they leave. When they go to a burlesque show, the show starts at a [predetermined] time, they pay a cover (not the performers), they watch the show, there isn’t usually any one-on-one interaction, and they leave when the performance is over.



I would also imagine that sexual titillation is the priority for someone at a strip club, whereas entertainment, costuming, dance, or some fantastic tableau may be the driving interest of someone at a burlesque revue. From the performer’s point of view, the difference is mostly of intention. A dancer in a strip joint is at least trying to tailor her performance to maximize her income – a noble pursuit – by putting the erotic qualities up front, whereas burlesque numbers tend to be more glamorous, with a greater focus on costumes than nudity, and on creative content. Some people don’t like making a distinction because it seems as though you have to privilege one to the other, but it is necessary to do so when describing to a potential producer or someone who may host your event at their venue – you have to be able to.

The New York School of Burlesque is just three blocks from where Minsky’s Burlesque was once located. Do you feel like burlesque has a natural home in the Lower East Side?

Yes, absolutely, I really do. This is where burlesque first came to from England and developed into the combination of satire and girly show we now know it as.

Many of the performers have costumes with traditional flourishes. What is the role of tradition in burlesque?

There is a strong nod to the retro, a fascination with the stylings of pinups and strippers of the ‘40s and ‘50s. Burlesque’s heyday was the 1920s and ‘30s – with Gypsy Rose Lee and others.

Why is it that people would focus on the 1950s?

The heyday of burlesque is hard to pin down. In *Burleycue: An Underground History of Burlesque Days*, Bernard Sobel, writing in the ‘30s, argues that burlesque died then. [Others] argue that it died when [Fiorello LaGauradia] passed a law making it illegal to use the word “burlesque” on a marquee, and some argue that it died in the ‘50s or in the ‘60s with nude beaches. It’s just like rock ‘n’ roll – it’s been killed a hundred times. There isn’t one heyday for burlesque, although striptease is easier to associate with one era. Once striptease had put a generation behind it,

“FUCK IT!”

IF I DO NOT CONFORM TO VICTORIA’S SECRET MODELS, OR WEAR THE MAKEUP OR HAIRSTYLE OR SHOES THAT I’M SUPPOSED TO WEAR – OR IF I’M FATTER OR SKINNIER OR DEFORMED, IF YOU DON’T LIKE IT, IT’S YOUR PROBLEM, NOT MINE. I DON’T NEED PERMISSION FROM HOWARD STERN’S INTERNS TO BE HOT ENOUGH TO HAVE FUN.”



PHOTO Elsa Sjunneson

PHOTO Scott Shuster



[burlesque] had a stigma. When I see women who did burlesque in the '40s or '50s, I see women who were fierce in the face of this stigma.

I've talked to some of them – the actual women from photographs. Their lives were not easy. The women who did burlesque in the '20s and '30s had even more stigma. Some say that I'm celebrating an era when women were oppressed [but really] I'm celebrating the spirit of women who were denigrated but insisted on being fierce and glamorous anyway. They did not always choose this life. Other performers on their bills – comedians, actors, dancers, singers – could move into other media. The art of striptease artists was not allowed to travel in this way. They were outcasts.

It has been argued that burlesque helped break down the gender roles of the Victorian age because women removed their highly encoded, restrictive head-to-toe coverings in public.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, burlesque artists sometimes dressed like men or somewhere in between, as argued by Robert Clyde Allen in *Horrible Prettiness*. Lucky, who teaches burlesque at [New York University], suggests that what had shocked people was that gender was blurred. [Women] were dressed in tights – as only men had been allowed – and sang and made jokes and addressed the audience directly, in a male way. It was not just the nudity but the inappropriateness. I've always celebrated inappropriateness in burlesque.

Among other things, burlesque means turning things upside down, a spirit of transgression. When Lydia and her troupe of blondes came to the U.S. at the origin of burlesque, dressing in a male and highly

“BURLESQUE IS JUST LIKE ROCK ‘N’ ROLL - IT'S BEEN KILLED A HUNDRED TIMES.”

sexualized way was partly responsible for the success and notoriety of the art form.

Definitely. I've been hanging out with drag queens and heavy metal dudes all my life. I've always wanted to play with gender like they do by playing up female characteristics

sometimes to the point where people think I'm a guy in drag. That's entertaining for me.

Like Victor Victoria! When and where did the most recent burlesque revival begin?

The current wave began in Los Angeles and New York in the mid-'90s. In Los Angeles, The Velvet Hammer was a self-conscious effort to create a modern burlesque show with a Cramps-style nod to the past. They were friends with the Cramps, so it was no coincidence. In New York, we were doing things in different venues: I was doing it in strip joints, Tigger was doing it with Penny Arcade in *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!* at gay bars, Dirty Martini was doing it at *Pink Inc.*, Julie Atlas Muz was doing it at Serena Vixen's *Red Vixen Show*, and Bonnie Dunn was doing it at *Blue Angel*. Kate Valentine of The Velvet Hammer also had a show in New York where all of these performers would do their numbers. At the time, there was no burlesque scene, but we were all interested in these images – flappers, iconic women of other ages – trying to put ourselves in their shoes, getting naked, and being generally irreverent while we did it. It's still transgressive even if nudity doesn't have the same meaning as it did in the Victorian era. It's not something you do in an office, and you don't do it seductively in front of the children. In a class society, your primary status – what you do for a living – is described by the way you dress. Stripping has the connotation of “Deal with my body. What do you see when you just see my decorated body, not my dressed body?” I'm not the biggest nudist, but I live with Julie Atlas Muz. She's a nudist! It's like living with clowns – it's the best thing ever! I'm still uptight about nudity because I worked in the nude for a living. It has a certain specific place in my life.

It certainly puts you in jeopardy in a variety of ways. There are some detractors who will say that you are feeding into women sexually objectifying themselves. How do you respond to this?

In some cases, it's just true, but it's not degrading every time someone is seen as a sexual object. I don't have a lot of experience with 1980s-style feminist interpretations of what gender means: the horrors of the male gaze. [It's the idea that] every time a man enjoys looking at a woman, he objectifies her and degrades her.



I understand that if someone works at places like trauma centers or in trafficking, they may come to see men that way, but I don't. Even in the sex industry, all men are not like that. I've met men like that, but only some men are like that and only under some circumstances. In the same way, some women performers seek that attention and some do not. It should be seen on a case-by-case basis. Until you judge each specific situation, you can't address what's going on or the underlying causes. Some people are just too skewed to see what's going on. What I see in burlesque are women who say, “Fuck it! If I do not conform to Victoria's Secret models or wear the makeup or hairstyle or shoes that I'm supposed to wear – or if I'm fatter or skinnier or deformed, if you don't like it, it's your problem, not mine. I don't need permission from Howard Stern's interns to be hot enough to have fun.” I don't see how that's not feminist. I know that there are certain privileges given to people with a certain appearance, but I'm still going to have this. I've never met a guy who says, “I can't wait to meet a girl who wears false eye lashes on the top and bottom of her eyes, wears a lot of feathers, and glues things to her nipples.” The idea that we are adhering to the dictates of the male gaze is beyond my comprehension.

In a strip show, the performance has its climax at the legal limit of nudity or contact, whereas, in burlesque, the journey – the performance – is the climax. Further, there are easily as many women in a burlesque audience as men, and many of the men may be gay or bisexual. It doesn't seem like a particularly heterosexist occasion.

I'm not saying that burlesque is all of these things to all people all of the time, but our performers are generally gender curious and choosing what they do. They don't get paid more to act more feminine, whereas in a strip joint they [would]. Our performers define what they do, not the other way around. Our audience wants to be shocked and awed. That said, strip joints are not the natural opposite of burlesque. They are not places where men go just to be awful to women. I didn't experience the sex industry that way, and I was in it for fifteen years. The idea that to be sexualized is always degrading does not make sense to me. I have experienced being sexualized as degrading and as liberating. Any polarization is going to be inaccurate. I have this perspective, not because I am privileged but because I have actually worked with, literally, thousands of other women in these situations. As an activist, I have spoken with women from all over the world who didn't wish to be infantilized or described as helpless, who didn't want their choices to be automatically categorized as invalid or to be called “Uncle Toms” for their decisions. There is a wide range of experience out there. Those who see objectification and

“IT'S STILL TRANSGRESSIVE, EVEN IF NUDITY DOESN'T HAVE THE SAME MEANING AS IT DID IN THE VICTORIAN ERA.”

exploitation operating one hundred percent of the time are not looking at what's going on most of the time. It isn't the only form of male behavior. Catherine MacKinnon says that it is the definition of “male,” but she doesn't see her privilege as a skinny, white woman sitting in an ivory tower.

Catherine MacKinnon is the very definition of privileged. Clan MacKinnon is an immensely wealthy family with its own island.

Linda Lovelace said, in my presence, that she felt just as exploited to the same degree by MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin as by her ex-husband.

When did you start the New York School of Burlesque and why?
It started about five years ago with a class people asked me to teach.

What classes are taught?

We teach basic movement classes, so people can a bump from a grind and learn what a peel and a tassel twirl are. We also teach isolations, which are healthy and useful for communicating. Dr. Lucky teaches theater classes and the World Famous *BOB* teaches glamour and confidence classes.

You teach women how to own the room – not be owned by the room.
That's a good way of describing it. *BOB* and Lucky have unique approaches that you can't get anywhere else. I have been training Darlinda – just Darlinda and Gal Friday – to teach my classes, and they've started their own.

Peekaboo Pointe teaches from a pilates background and Angie Pontani teaches go-go. I'm about to teach a class where, at some point, in each act, women will appear male. I play Satan.



TIFFA NOVOA

WALKING BETWEEN WORLDS

Right now, a distinct style of dress and adornment steeped for many years in Bay Area Burning Man culture is spilling over into the mainstream. LEATHER and FEATHERS, tattoos and STRETCHED earlobes, silks, pelts, shells, hammered silver, harnesses, elaborate face and body paint, GLITTER and dust and ribbons, swashbuckler's boots, brass, bells, bone. No one's certain what to call the look. Futuristic urban tribal? POST-APOCALYPTIC CARNIVAL NOMAD? Totemic burner chic? There's still NO DEFINITIVE TERM, and hallelujah for that. But there are names we all think of - or should - whenever we see it: *El Circo Productions*, *Onda Designs*, *Emte Fashion Systems*.

TIFFA NOVOA JUNE 6, 1975 - OCT 16, 2007

It's been nearly three years since the 32-year-old fashion designer Tiffa Novoa died of a fatal drug reaction while working in Bali, Indonesia, and left her vast community gasping with grief. But life goes on, and the star of HER INFLUENCE CONTINUES TO RISE. One need only look at the success of stores like Five & Diamond, or fashion houses like Skin. Graft to recognize the INCALCULABLE IMPACT of her work on an entire burgeoning cultural aesthetic. Tiffa, the "Dream Pusher" - as her Emte co-founder Evan Sugerman fondly calls her - is still walking between worlds. The following pages are devoted to her memory, her legacy, her loved ones, and all who dance to a different drum.

RESEARCH NADYA LEV
PHOTO ARCHIVIST SIOUXZEN KANG
INTRODUCTION MEREDITH YAYANOS



COILHOUSE



COILHOUSE



"My strongest connection was just before she passed. We did a show together at Burning Man. I directed, she created the costumes, and we conceptualized it together. The show was a lifetime achievement for both of us - the epitome of everything that we had been working on. It was the end of an era; it felt like a closing. She died a month later.

For the show, she created giant gowns and headdresses of unique animal parts - jungle tiger heads, bear teeth, chicken feet, exotic bird feathers, all woven into Victorian costume silhouettes of beautiful leathers and silks.

The show started off with Ashley, lit from above by a blue spotlight that resembled lunar beams. She was singing an ancient opera about two warring countries. The theme of the show was about how times of war and struggle can affect art. The lights shot over to the stage, where an altar had been built. Rigzin was sitting in there, with Shawna above her, wearing a cheetah headdress and fire fingers. As Shawna's fingers lit up, all these surrounding welded metallic trees that Jason Bernard had crafted lit up also, and there were crystal shards shooting out of them around the altar, opening the ceremony.

The light dimmed and shot over to me as strobes began to flash. I was there with a giant mohawk, a studded corset, and a huge trailing dress. I was holding a mechanical drum that I had built - a device with hammers and a big module knob that changed the beat as I turned it. A flame shot behind me, creating a silhouette as I used the drum in rhythm with a live electronic soundscape. There were two girls hanging in metal cages. When their eyes shut, they had painted-on eyes that glowed. There were huge paintings on the dome walls by Oppi Snow of multi-armed female deities holding a different tool in each arm, goddesses in a wild jungle setting.

In the next scene, Joshuadavid did a suspension, flying through the air with hooks in his back to a slow, emotional song. Auberon, Oppi, and Tiffa did a triple-fan piece in these white gowns with graffiti painting all over them. They were wearing gas masks, and Joshuadavid dropped rose petals and ribbons down on them as they were dancing. The piece ended with Auberon stripping down and pulling red material from underneath her skirt as if it were blood. She took her gas mask off and unveiled, launching into a dance piece.

I remember many moments of watching the show and feeling like it was going amazingly well, but also feeling really nostalgic. As Josh was doing his piece, I felt it most keenly - that was the end of an era, a major turning point. This was the death of something. It was a cathartic ecstasy of so many mediums of artistry. Together, that night, I felt like we created a sort of timeless space.

It almost felt like we were doing the rites for Tiffa's coming passing - and we didn't even know it."

- MALAKAI, PERFORMANCE COLLABORATOR

I don't think Tiffa's work was about making a woman look sexy, necessarily. It really wasn't about the human form but perhaps about giving people

THE ABILITY TO FEEL LIKE NON-HUMAN CREATURES

In her life, she was extremely respected and unanimously adored, but she was also very elusive, even to her close friends. She had an otherworldly commitment to her work. She could disappear either energetically or physically for a long time and come back from her travels having conjured the most amazingly coordinated performance or jaw-dropping fashion art. She always appeared to have one foot here and one foot in some other realm.

LORIN ASHTON, MUSICAL COLLABORATOR

OPPOSITE PAGE Photograph by Siouxzen Kang.
THIS PAGE 1. Photography by Flynn. Models: Malakai and Indeara Rose. Hair and makeup: Nicole Marie. 2. Photograph by Adam Tennenbaum. 3. Photograph: Tiffa's Final El Circo Show by Arrow One.





At the time of Tiffa's passing, we had recently finished shooting a series of images with the intention of making them into a book. The project culminated in shooting a series in a beautiful location very significant to Tiffa in Northern California. We had only just begun editing these images when she passed away. For me, working with Tiffa felt like a silently shared language ... One of my favorite things about collaborating with her was her trust in those she chose to work with. She evoked a feeling of endless possibility in me, and I find myself thinking of her on a daily basis. **FLYNN, PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLABORATOR** Her darkness was filled with light. All the demons and the macabre that she referenced in her work were not rooted in darkness for the sake of being dark. Instead, she was coming from a place of prolific light of visionary proportions. Her use of the natural world – of tribal furs and leather and skins – never felt forced or trendy. Rather, it seemed so organic and effortless it was as if she was communicating with the animal world herself. She inspired an entire generation of designers. **JONNY COTA, SKIN.GRAFT DESIGNER** Tiffa was a lightworker that chose to walk this plane with us – to unselfishly show us that we can conquer anything beyond our wildest dreams. Her passion was not merely a heightened sensual fusion but a way of life she produced for herself and each one of us she touched along the way. **SIOUXZEN KANO, PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLABORATOR** Meeting Tiffa and her first performance troupe, El Circo, was hugely influential on me. [They] had the most impressive costumes, a gorgeous (and legendary) dome stage, intricately carved metal props, people flying off the walls, fire exploding all around, dripping fresh music... it blew my mind. ... [Tiffa] was soft-spoken, but people hung on her words and ideas, and made them happen. You just wanted to work with her and trust her. That desire brought the most talented people into her sphere. Though she may be remembered more for her later work with Ernte... her early work as a visionary performance artist will always be part of my life's number-one lesson: how to achieve great things with an artistic vision and a dedicated group of people. **CASSIDY HAILEY, ERNTE AND SKIN.GRAFT COLLABORATOR** Tiffa's influence on the style of our community is far-reaching and deeper than I think anyone can imagine. Her ability to go above and beyond the parameters of reality in her work was uncanny. She had a golden touch, and I am happy her legacy can survive long beyond her physical body. Tiffa's presence is felt all over Bali, and I hope her inspiration, passion, and drive can carry on through each one of us. **KATIE KAY, SKIN.GRAFT COLLABORATOR** She had a magic that was all her own. Feathers, fur, leather, skulls, bones, studs, shells, bells ... were colors within her pallet that she could effortlessly weave together into something not only original but astoundingly beautiful. The 'signature' on her works, or works inspired by her, has and will outlive her physical form. [Tiffa] left us with a legacy that is worthy of an entire tribe's inspiration and reflection. **ANDREW JONES, ART COLLABORATOR** We came together when I moved to Ashland, Oregon. I was a fire dancer. I had a troupe in Santa Cruz, and then I moved up to Oregon and we all started fire dancing together. That's when we just created El Circo and started choreographing fire shows. Eventually Tiffa started designing the costumes and I did the accessories for the fire show that we were performing. Tiffa had this power: when she had a vision that she wanted to bring into reality, every person and every little element that was needed to carry out this grand idea would just pop up out of nowhere. She just could attract people into her vision like nobody else that I have ever seen in my life. **MARISA YOULDEN, PERFORMANCE COLLABORATOR** She was a channel of pure creativity. It just poured out of her like a force of nature. In fact, I always felt like her being resembled a force of nature and spirit more than a human, with moods like weather patterns. She never cared about recognition – just the creation itself. She continues to deeply affect all of her family, and a huge community beyond, with her unique and powerful imprint on this life. **SHAWNA HOFFMANN, FRIEND** Tiffa always just pushed forward. She was never stagnant. Through dreams and visions, she was able to manifest the most mind-blowing creations. She was incredibly devoted to her friends. We never really collaborated except that she was the one that got me into music, into deejaying and performing. She was my inspiration because I always wanted to do it, and she was the one who said, "You just gotta do it!" And she gave me my first chance, playing at Burning Man at the dome. She inspired many people to do what they love. **LAURA HOWETT, FRIEND** In 2007, I was lucky enough to work on a shoot with Tiffa and photographer Brion Topolski. I got a close-up look at her work and was fascinated with the textures and colors of her gowns and headdresses. The work blew my mind wide open ... She made things I only saw in my weirdest of dreams, beautiful characters that somehow walked the line between modern and ancient. Tiffa served up an entirely new aesthetic style to a huge community of artists that, ultimately, has echoed her vision enough to create an entire fashion subculture based solely on her work. **MEDINA MAITREYA, DESIGNER** Her life was so busy, flying all over the world. But here, in the woods, she was happiest. There were many long nights sitting by the fire, talking. She told me of her visions, otherworldly realms that inspired her, and I revealed to her the depth of my spiritual practices. We came from such different worlds, yet we completely understood each other, sharing our minds' space. We were a close family, the artist collective El Circo. It was by no accident we came together. The costumes she made were not ordinary. She showed us our essence...she freed us to fully embody who we really were. She created a stage and forced us to step up to our full potential. It was empowering. Her intuition was strong, and we all followed her lead. **RIOZIN, PERFORMANCE COLLABORATOR**

SHOUT OUT TO TIFFA Adam Freeland • Adam Tenenbaum • Arrow One • Ashley Knight • Auberon • Benny • Brion Topolski • Caroline • Chris Sia • Darrah Danielle • Dean Snead • Diego Novoa • Dream • Dusty Paik • El Circo • Faux Pas • Hans Haveron • Indeara Rose • Jan Hilmer • Jason Bernard • Jessica Atreides • Jill Snead • Joshua Brott • Joshuadavid Reno • Karen • Kate Geaghan • Kerri Snead • Kyan • Kyle Hailey • Lucent Dossier Experience • Lui Onozaki • Lynx • Mary Lee • Masaki Hara • Matty Dowlen • Melodia • Nej Wan • Nicole Marie • Opie Snow • Pheobe Durlan • Rachel Brice • Random Rab • Sage • Savanna Dawkins • Sayoko • Siren • Skye • Spencer Hansen • Stu • Thomas Snead • Travis Loftin • Vladimir • Yard Dogs Road Show • Yohan • Zoe Jakes

ON THIS PAGE - MODELS: Katie Kay & Cassidy Haley of Skin.Graft, Melodia of Melodia Designs, Ulorin Vex. HAIR: Noogie Thai. MAKEUP: David Hernandez assisted by Shyann Swisher. WARDROBE: Melodia, Ernte collectrice. PHOTOGRAPHER: Allan Amato [Shot in the Edison Downtown]



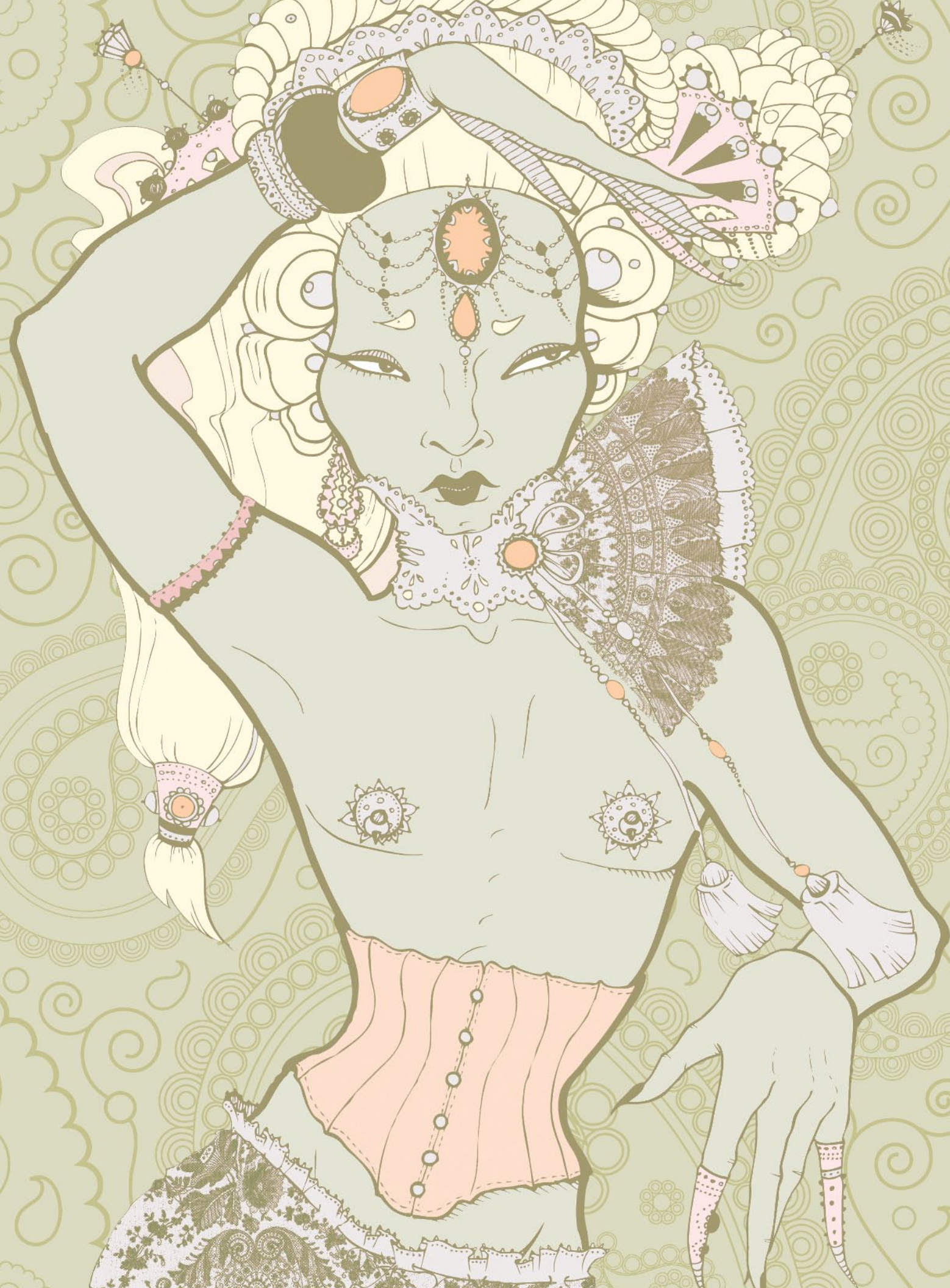
MODEL: Malakai PHOTOGRAPHER: Austin Young

Inspire

“Making art is part act of celebration,
part act of remembrance, part act of proph-
ecy. In the ideal world, you’re doing all three
at the same time.”

Clive Barker, page 68

ILLUSTRATION Zoetica Ebb





SOME PAINTINGS GRAB YOU BY THE THROAT, whereas others show the force of their impact by the tenacity with which they linger, hovering around the edges of your consciousness. It's a rare artist who captures both. Chris Conn Askew creates modern-day fables for romantics and aesthetes, as densely layered in symbolism as dreams and as inscrutable as love. In many of these images, there is a sense of penance and the idea of transcendence through suffering. In this pantheon of martyrs, the thorns that pierce flesh become lush adornments, stockings are torn, and smoky eyes are streaked with tears. Animals look as if they could quote Bataille and seem to be guiding their human companions. Birds carry antique rosaries, and bloodied bandages seem like badges of honor. Pearls are a persistent motif, the tangible proof that luminous beauty can be created from malady; perhaps they are ossified tears? The subjects often seem to be complicit in their struggles, yet they are exquisitely armored to conquer their unseen adversaries. Ornately veiled, they seek answers to the riddle of redemption.



When we were talking the other day, you mentioned that you are fascinated by the etymology of words. One of the things that I've always been curious about, regarding your work, is the etymology of certain recurrent symbols. Each of your paintings seems to incorporate layer upon layer of meticulously coded references. I have the feeling you don't necessarily intend the viewer to solve these riddles. (That might be like cutting open a bird to find its song.) Still, I would love to hear a tidbit or two about how each of these elements fits into your world.

It's true that it is not my intention to make any hidden meanings. There definitely are a lot of little clues (hidden and otherwise) strewn about, although I don't always know what they're clues to. I've just always liked puzzles and codes. Though I do have some specific intentions at the outset, things always change in unexpected ways during the process, and I usually don't realize what my paintings are about until way after the fact. A symbol may mean one thing at the beginning and something entirely different at the end. Among the more visible and repeated symbols, though, there are definitely some specific meanings, although they may change slightly depending on context:

Bloody handprints

Well, it's a bloody world, isn't it? It's important too that it's usually a left hand and of a child's size.

White mice with entwined tails

That one is inspired by the "rat king," a phenomena from Europe, where many rats would be found with their tails permanently intertwined and fused, supposedly living as one compound organism. That story has always fascinated me. It's a perfect metaphor for what the inside of my head feels like, pulled in several directions at once.

The symbols and accessories of Catholicism: rosaries, miters, crosses, etc.

Catholicism is probably my all-time favorite death cult, and of course it's a great source for some rich, decadent, and surprisingly sensual morbidity. It's definitely the sexiest of all of the major religions, in my humble opinion.

Daggers, crowns, and heraldic crests

Daggers – as well as thorns, hairpins, and miscellaneous other sharp objects – are, in a rather tarotic way, pain and hardship, trouble and strife. I suppose the crowns may have something to do with autonomy and with the inner kingdom. The crests are there mostly just 'cause I think they're pretty, and they make a nice little frame for containing other symbols. That stuff is all inspired by Japanese print art. I have always loved the way they stud the borders with little text-filled cartouches.

Militaristic uniforms, medals, and the Iron Cross

I must admit, I just think archaic military costumes and medals are terribly dashing and dramatic, nothing more, though life can certainly feel like a war sometimes. The crosses, iron or otherwise, can have many meanings: a symbol of the metaphysical and mystical crossroads, or of the Western cultural tradition, or of asceticism and sacrifice, or even of death.

Crescent moons

The moon, Her Blessed Majesty La Luna, is the nighttime, and all of the things that come with it: dreams, secrets, mysteries. To me the sun is harsh and unforgiving, and the moon sheds the sort of light that nurtures the more obscure and liminal sorts of experience that I cherish.

96

"96 Tears," a fantastic song by Question Mark and the Mysterians. It's been stuck in my head since around 1976.

The Nightingale and the Rose refers to the story by Oscar Wilde. Are any other works based on a specific piece of literature?

I did a triptych based on characters from one of my favorite books, Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, and I recently did a portrait of him for a book cover.

Annunciation 14"x42" watercolor,ink,graphite and gold leaf on paper

COILHOUSE



None of the others have any specific references that I can think of offhand, but I read constantly, and whatever I am reading at the time often has a very strong effect on what I am making, though it's rarely direct or literal. I have found that certain veins of literature that I have been recently exploring have started to produce some major changes in me that have yet to be reflected in my work, but it's inevitable. We'll see how that manifests.

Many of your paintings incorporate text, sometimes in several different languages. How do you decide which language or languages to use for a particular piece? Do you write the text, or are they quotes? I almost always write the text myself, though I have used quotes once or twice. I did a painting with some Marc Bolan lyrics in it. The language choice is, more often than not, a visual and auditory one. I'll translate into several options and make my choice based on how it looks written out in the appropriate alphabet, and how the phrase sounds phonetically. The sound and rhythm is very important, and lately many of the phrases I've used are intended to have a sort of nursery rhyme chantiness to them. Occasionally I have gone about it backwards, especially with the Eastern languages, flipping through interlingual dictionaries and finding some phrase that is particular to that language, not directly translatable, and that seems appropriate to the piece. There's one that I've been sitting on for a while that I'm about to use. It's an Arabic word that can mean the new moon, the white blaze on a black horse's forehead, or anything that is nearly perfect. Basically I'm always just looking for an excuse to use lots of fancy text.

Something that is immediately striking about your work is its strong graphic sensibility. There is often ornate typography, decorative flourishes, and solid blocks of color framing the central imagery. Are there specific artists and/or time periods that have influenced you in this regard?

Oh, yes, so many. All of the old Japanese print artists, the propaganda from both world wars (particularly the second one), European and Latin American religious art, postage stamps and currency, the album covers I loved as a kid, and mostly an endless list of wonderful book illustrators, from the first illuminated manuscripts to the woodcut artists and engravers of somewhat more recent eras, to the children's books of the turn of the century and onward. I have always been drawn to these sorts of heavily stylized, emblematic, well-ordered graphic forms.

Many of your images seem like illustrations in the sense that they seem too specific, too fully realized in the details, to not be part of a larger context. I can't help but wonder if you have stacks of unpublished manuscripts hidden under your bed. Have you written stories to accompany any of your existing works?

Even though I rarely illustrate the ideas of others anymore, I still tend to think of myself more as an illustrator than an artist. I'm just an illustrator who commissions himself to illustrate his own stories. I have been writing a lot this year, but so far none of it relates directly to any of the pieces I've been making, and may not even appeal at all to those who like my paintings. I am definitely working towards the



No Tears 15"x36" watercolor and ink on paper

COILHOUSE

goal of a project that combines both. Someday there may be a book or two, perhaps a children's picture book, or a nihilist missal, or maybe even a collection of pornographic fables, or a military history from a nonexistent war. We'll see.

I was fascinated by the in-progress images of Kshatriya that you posted on your blog. Could you describe your (quite elaborate) technique?

Well, it's a pretty involved process, with many layers, and I have to plan it all out beforehand, as the mediums I use are not terribly forgiving. I draw the basic design onto paper very lightly with pencil, then I apply several layers of watercolor, starting with any large flat fields of color, sometimes using masking, and working down to the minor details with smaller and smaller brushes. Then I do all of the ink work with brush and pens, and then I often use a lot of graphite pencil, pushing the lead around a bit with a shading stump. After this, I do any opaque paintwork (usually just the little white or gold dots I am so very fond of) and occasionally a bit of gold leafing. I have used small accents of collage or silkscreen, but not very often. I may play with those more in the future. I'd definitely like to involve some more varied mediums.

What is next for you in terms of the direction of your upcoming work?

Well, despite my attraction to rigid forms of layout and whatnot, I have been recently developing a need to loosen up a bit – do something a bit less strict and planned, more immediate. The ideas and feelings I carry inside have been growing a little less sharp-edged and a bit more fluid, and inevitably that's going to show at the other end of the pencil. I just haven't quite worked out how to let that element into my style gracefully, so I'm going to let it come naturally, if at all.





Kshatriya 9"x31" watercolor, ink, graphite, and silkscreen on paper

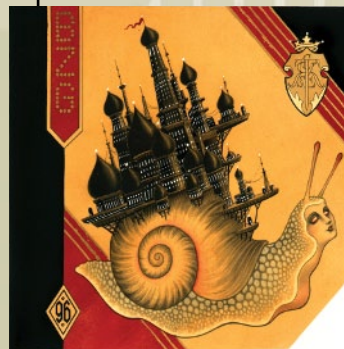


Behemoth 8"x16" watercolor,ink,graphite,goldleaf,+collage on paper.

La Croix Rouge 12"x32" watercolor, ink, graphite and gold leaf on paper

Six Girls 18"x45" watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper

BZG 9"x11" watercolor, ink, graphite, and gold leaf on paper



Hide your Love 11"x14" watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper

Fox 14"x23" watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper



SURGICAL
PRECISION:

ALI MAHDABI

THE SCRUPULOUS PORTRAITURE of Ali Mahdavi reflects an appreciation for unique physical beauty that is purely self-made. Born and raised in Tehran before relocating to Paris, the photographer, filmmaker and costume designer has crafted striking portraits of Tilda Swinton, Mr. Pearl, Kylie Minogue, Dita von Teese and **AJUMA NASENYANA** (the Kenyan supermodel channeling Grace Jones on this issue's cover). In his self-portraits, Ali Mahdavi explores the sublime intersection between glamour and dysmorphia. The three works selected for this mini-feature, portraying model Hannelore Knuts, corsetier Mr. Pearl and Mahdavi himself (from his series "As You Desire Me"), serve as a tantalizing first glimpse into Mahdavi's carefully-arranged world.

INTRODUCTION Nadya Lev

COILHOUSE



COILHOUSE



A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG GEEK

Title

WIL WHEATON

By

Excerpted from *The Happiest Days of Our Lives*, available from Subterranean Press.
Portions of this memoir originally appeared on the *SuicideGirls* Newswire.

THACO

All imagery included here, a lifetime's worth of RPG gear, comes courtesy of a photo shoot of Wil's game room/office. pict-secs by Zoetica Ebb

Photography

December, 1983

I sat on the floor in Aunt Val's house and opened up her Christmas present to me. It was a red box with a really cool-looking dragon on the front of it. Inside, there were a few books, some dice, a map, and a crayon to color in the dice. "That's a game that I hear lots of kids like to play, Willow," she said. "It's dragons and wizards and those things you liked from *The Hobbit*. The back says you use your imagination, and I know what a great imagination you have." My brother played with Legos and my cousins played with handheld electronic games. I felt a little ripped off. "Wow," I said, masking my disappointment. "Thanks, Aunt Val!"

Later, while the other kids played with Simon and Mattel Electronic Football, I sat near the fireplace and examined my gift. It said that I could be a wizard or a fighter, but there weren't any pieces that looked like that. There were a lot of weird dice, but I had to color in the numbers. That seemed silly, but at least

it was something to do, so I grabbed the black crayon and rubbed it over the pale blue dice, just like the instructions said.

Aunt Val (who was my favorite relative in the world throughout my entire childhood and right up until she died a few years ago) walked into the living room. "What do you think, Willow?"

"I colored the dice," I said, and showed her the result. "But I haven't read the book yet."

She patted my leg. "Well, I hope you like it." She moved to the other side of the room, where my cousin Jack poked at a Nintendo Game and Watch.

I opened the *Player's Guide* and began to read.

February, 1984

It was afternoon PE in fifth grade, and I was terrified. I ran and jumped and ducked, surrounded by a jeering crowd of my classmates. The PE teacher did nothing to stop the attack—and, in fact, encouraged it.

"Get him!" someone yelled as I fell to the asphalt, small rocks digging into my palms. I breathed hard. Through my adrenaline-fueled flight-or-fight response, the world slowed, the jeering faded, and I wondered to myself why our playground was just a parking lot and why we had to wear corduroy pants in the middle of a Southern California heat wave. Before I could offer any answers, a clear and loud voice spoke from within my head. "Hey," it said. "You'd better get up and move, or you're dead."

I nodded my head and looked up in time to see the red playground ball, spinning in slow motion, as the word "Voit" rotated into view. Pain exploded across my face and a mighty cheer erupted from the crowd. The PE teacher blew her whistle.

I don't know how I managed to be the last kid standing on our team. I usually ran right to the front of the court so I could get knocked out quickly and (hopefully) painlessly before the good players got worked up by the furor of battle and started taking head shots, but I'd been stricken by a bout of temporary insanity—

He held up the book and I saw its cover: a giant statue, illuminated by torches, sat behind an archway. Two guys were on its head, prying loose one of its jeweled eyes... One was clearly a wizard; another was obviously a knight.

possibly caused by the heat—on this February day, and I'd actually played to win the game, using a very simple strategy: run like hell and hope to get lucky.

I blinked back tears as I looked up at Jimmie Just, who had delivered the fatal blow. Jimmie was the playground bully. He spent as much time in the principal's office as he did in our classroom, and he was the most feared dodgeball player at the Lutheran School of the Foothills.

He laughed at me, his long hair stuck to his face in sweaty mats, and sneered. "Nice try, Wil the Pill."

I picked myself up off the ground, determined not to cry. I sucked in deep breaths of air through my nose.

Mrs. Cooper, the PE teacher, walked over to me. "Are you okay, Wil?" she asked.

"Uh-huh," I lied. Anything more than that and I risked breaking down into humiliating sobs that would follow me around the rest of the school year, and probably on into sixth grade.

"Why don't you go wash off your face," she said, not unkindly, "and sit down for a minute."

"Okay," I said. I walked slowly across the blacktop to the drinking fountains. Maybe if I really took my time, I could run out the clock and I wouldn't have to play another stupid dodgeball game.

January, 1984

Papers scattered across my bed appeared to be homework to the casual observer, but to me they were people. A thief, a couple of wizards, some fighters: a party of adventurers who desperately wanted to storm The Keep on the Borderlands. But without anyone to guide them, they sat alone, trapped in the purgatory of my bedroom, straining behind college-ruled blue lines to come to life.

I tried to recruit my younger brother to play with me, but he was 7, and more interested in Monchichi. The kids in my neighborhood were more interested in football and riding bikes, so I was left to read through module B2 by myself, wandering the Caves of Chaos and dodging Lizard Men alone.

February, 1984

I washed my face and drank deeply from the drinking fountain. By the time I made it back to the benches along the playground's southern edge, I'd lost the urge to cry, but my face radiated enough heat to compete with the blistering La Crescenta sun.

I sat down near Simon Teele, who, thanks to the wonders of alphabetization, ended up with me and Harry Yan (the school's lone Asian kid) on field trips, on fire drills, and in chapel. Simon was taller than all of us, wore his hair down into his face, and really kept to himself. He was reading an oversized book that sort of looked like a textbook, filled with charts and tables.

We weren't officially friends, but I knew him well enough to make polite conversation.

"Hey," I said. "Why don't you have to play dodgeball?"

"Asthma."

"Lucky," I said. "I hate dodgeball."

"Everyone hates dodgeball," he said, "except Jimmie Just."

"Yeah." I was relieved to hear someone else say out loud what I'd been thinking since fourth grade.

"Hey," I said. "What are you reading?"

He held up the book and I saw its cover: a giant statue, illuminated by torches, sat behind an archway. Two guys were on its head, prying loose one of its jeweled eyes, as a group of people stood at the base. One was clearly a wizard; another was obviously a knight.

"Player's Handbook," he said. "Do you play D&D?"

I gasped. According to our ultra-religious school, D&D was Satanic. I looked up

for teachers, but none were nearby. A hundred feet away on the playground, another game of dodgeball was underway. I involuntarily flinched when I heard the hollow pang! of the ball as it skipped off the ground.

"You're going to get in trouble if you get caught with that," I said.

"No, I won't," he said. "If I just keep it turned upside down, they'll never see it. So do you play or not?"

"I have the red box set and a bunch of characters, but I don't have anyone to play with."

"That's Basic," he said. "This is Advanced."

"Oh."

"But if you want, you could come over to my house this weekend and we could play."

I couldn't believe my good luck. With a dodgeball to the face, Fate put me on the bench next to the kid who, over the next few months, helped me take my first tentative steps down the path to geekdom. He had a ton of AD&D books: the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, which had a truly terrifying demon on the cover, and would result in certain expulsion if seen at school; the *Monster Manual*, which was filled with dragons; and the *Fiend Folio*, which not only had demons and devils, but a harpy and a nymph, accompanied by a drawing of a naked woman! With *boobs*!!

Simon's parents were divorced, and he lived with his mom in a huge house in La Canada. His room was filled with evidence of a custody Cold War. Too many toys to count littered the floor and spilled out of the closet, but even though we were surrounded by Atari and Intellivision, GI Joe and Transformers, we had D&D fever, and the only prescription was more polyhedral dice.

Though it was just the two of us playing, we stormed the Keep on the Borderlands and explored the Isle of Dread. We spent all our free time at school making new characters, designing dungeons, and unsuccessfully attempting to recruit other kids to play with us.

March 1984

My babysitter Gina's older brother was an experienced Dungeon Master, and he let us play in one of his custom-made dungeons. My fighter walked into a room, got trapped behind a portcullis, and died when I sprang a trap trying to escape. Simon and I decided later that it would be okay to resurrect him for our own adventures without penalty, because Gina's brother's dungeon was really too hard, and it wasn't part of our world, anyway.

June, 1984

Simon and I finally got two other kids to join our group: Robert and his friend David. The four of us were officially declared "the nerds" by the cool kids at school, and we played almost every weekend. I started carrying my dice, a couple of pencils, and folded-up character sheets with me everywhere I went, stored in a pleather Casio calculator case that my dad gave me.

The Satanic Panic, fueled by Jack Chick's "Dark Dungeons" and some "investigative" reporting on television news magazines, reached our suburban school. I brought home a letter from school warning our parents about the dangers of *Dungeons and Dragons*. My parents laughed it off, but Robert's did not; he was prohibited from playing with us anymore, and since he brought David into our little group, David left too. Then, right when school was about to get out for summer, we were dealt a total party kill: Simon's mom was moving the two of them to Indiana.

July, 1984

With Simon gone and the Satanic Panic at its peak, I didn't have anyone to play with. My books and character sheets slowly made their way into my closet as Atari began to creep further and further into my life. Then, for my birthday, Aunt Val gave me a book called *Lone Wolf*. It was like Choose Your Adventure, but you had a character sheet and rolled dice for combat! It wasn't D&D, but it was close enough.

1987

I was a freshman in high school and gained admittance to a group of geeks via my friend Darin. We played tons of geeky games together, watched *Holy Grail* at least once a month, and argued the finer points of sci-fi. I was finally surrounded by geeks again, only this time I was proud to be counted among their number.

One day, sitting in Darin's house and playing *Illuminati*, I said, "Hey, do any of you guys ever play D&D?"

There was a collective snort of derision.

"What?" I asked.

"We play *GURPS*," one of them said.

"What's that?"

A knowing look passed among them.

Within a few weeks, I started in my first Space/Old West/Magic campaign.

June, 1992: The Dark Ages

I met and began dating a girl who didn't appreciate gaming at all and thought it was entirely for nerds. I collected my games and put them all into storage.

March, 1993: The Renaissance

We broke up. The games came back out of storage. I'm pretty sure my 40K Space Marine armies held a bit of a grudge.

1999

After living together for three years, my girlfriend and I moved out of Sin and into Married Life. I began counting the days until I could introduce her children, who I was raising as if they were my own, to the wonderful world of gaming.

After we'd spent about six years in each other's lives, I began gradually to introduce the kids to some of the geekier things I like. By the time the *Lord of the Rings* movies came out, they were ready to take their first steps down a path that began in a tavern and ended in a dragon's lair.

February, 2004

The boys and I spent a week or so creating characters and discussing the rules, building excitement for the adventure. I stayed up way too late each night after the kids went to bed, poring over websites and my rule books, simulating combats and creating NPCs. It was the first time I'd run an adventure since *The Isle of Dread* in sixth grade, when I scored a Total Party Kill during the first encounter. I never got to sit behind the screen again.

I sat at the dining room table and reviewed cleric spells while the *Two Towers* soundtrack inspired my imagination. Ryan came out of his room and sat down across from me.

"Whatcha doing?" he asked.

"Just refreshing my memory. It's been—" I paused. "Well, it's been a really long time since I ran a campaign, and I want..."

I want you to think I'm cool. I want to do something special for you. I want to share something with you that isn't sports-related, so your dad can't take it over and force me out of it.

"I want to make sure you guys have a good time," I said. "It's important to me."

"I'm so excited!" he said.

"Me too."

He absentmindedly rolled some dzos I'd scattered across the table.

"Can I roll up an extra character, just for fun?" he asked.

"Is your homework finished?"

"Yeah. Everything's done, and I worked ahead in Biology."

"Really?"

He nodded.

"Dude. That's super-responsible. I'm proud of you."

He smiled. "So can I?"

"Sure," I said. "The dice bags are on my desk."

He walked over to my office. My desk, normally buried under computer books and writing journals, was covered with gaming books: *GURPS*, *Mutants and Masterminds*, *Car Wars*, too many Cheapass games to count, and—of course—a stack of D&D books ten feet tall.

"It's 4d6, right?" he called out.

"Yep, 4d6. And you—"

"—throw away the lowest roll," we said in unison.

"Ryan, I..."

I love it when that happens.

"I have an extra character sheet here that you can use."

"I was FINALLY surrounded by geeks again, only this time I was proud to be counted among their number."

“

You are about to see your stepdad as the old gamer geek he really is. The gamer geek I hope you'll be one day...”

“Okay.”

I went back to my books. A moment later, four six-sided dice dropped from Ryan's hand and rolled across the table.

“Since you're the DM, will you watch my rolls?”

“You bet! This is...”

This is something I'll remember for the rest of my life.

“This is really fun.”

He picked up the dice and threw them: 2—4—5—1.

“Eleven?! Oh man!” he said.

“Eleven isn't a bad roll at all.” I noticed something familiar about the dice. Two of them were black, with red numbers. There was a skull where the 1 would have been.

“Hey, I have dice just like those in—”

My heart stopped. I ran into my office.

There it was, in the cool blue glow of my monitor, atop my *Freedom City* sourcebook: an open bag of dice. My bag of dice. The black one, with the red pyramid from the Bavarian Illuminati on it. A clear d10 and two brilliant blue d12s sat near its open top. Its drawstring was cast carelessly across the side of the book, dangerously close to my Zen fountain.

Ryan slowly walked into the room.

“Is something wrong?” he asked.

“You...you touched my dice!” I felt a little woozy.

“Well...yeah.”

“No, Ryan, you...”

You are about to see your stepdad as the old gamer geek he really is. The gamer geek I hope you'll be one day...you know, this is actually kind of cool.

“You can't ever touch my dice,” I said, patiently.

“Uhh...aren't they all,” he made quote marks with his fingers, “your dice?”

“Technically, yes, but these here, in this bag, they're the ones I've played with since I was in high school.”

He furrowed his brow and looked at me while I put “my dice” back into my bag. A white d8 with worn-off blue numbers, the clear d10 with white numbers, a green d6 that's really a poker die...

“When I was younger, these dice...”

These dice were some of the most important things in my life. Well, I have some perspective now.

“These dice were a big part of my life,” I said.

I held the bag in my hand and looked at him. For the first time in eight years, I saw some of myself reflected back.

“You know what? It's not that big a deal. I'd just rather you used some other dice,” I said.

“So can I re-roll that eleven since I used...” He lowered his head, and spoke in a grave voice: “The Forbidden Dice?”

We laughed together.

“Eleven is a good roll, Ryan.”

“I know, but twelve gets me plus one.”

“Okay. You can re-roll. But if you get a lower roll, you have to keep it.”

I tossed him my green “community” bag.

“Deal,” he said, as he dug out four dice.

We walked back into the dining room and sat back down at the table. Ryan threw 2—5—2—1.

“Nine?! Oh man!”

“I bet that eleven is looking pretty good now, isn't it?”

“Shut up.” He laughed.

He collected the dice, held them thoughtfully for a second, and said, “Wil, I'm sorry I used your dice. I just thought that bag was really cool.”

“It's okay, Ryan. Someday...”

Someday, I'll give that bag, and all the dice in it, to you.

“Someday, you'll have your own dice, and your own dice bag, and you'll understand.”

He threw 4d6: 6—6—4—4.

“Sixteen! Rock!” He threw the goat.

On an index card, he wrote a one and a six beneath his nine.

“Ryan, I...”

I love you more than you'll ever know. Thank you for sharing these moments with me.

“I can't wait to play with you guys tomorrow night.”

June, 2007

As much as I want to, I can't hate dodgeball or the “cool” kids who tormented me throughout the years. Without that influence, I probably wouldn't have discovered gaming, and no single thing contributes as much to my geekiness or brings me as much joy.

I still flinch when I hear that hollow *pang!* of a dodgeball, though. That's a saving throw I think I'll always fail.

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COILHOUSE.NET/ADVERTISE

C ellist and composer Zoë Keating first came to renown several years ago while playing second fiddle (so to speak) in the honorable *neo-Victorian indie rock* ensemble

Rasputina. Those of us who

witnessed Keating's live performances with the band, or listened for her contributions on the album *Frustration Plantation*, were astonished by the Tilda Swintonesque beauty's remarkable ear and *deep, rich tone*. As it turns out, we were only hearing select facets of what she's capable of.

More recently, Keating began *self-producing lush, melodic instrumental solo recordings* that incorporate live electronic sampling, computer *looping programs*, complex layering, and phrase repetition. Pop, ambient, electronic, and orchestral sensibilities trade off and interlace. Each distinctive element is bolstered by her commanding musicianship and sensitivity: *Keating has built a hypnotic, swaying bridge between the old guard and the new*.

Despite zero backing from a record label, and with only the barest minimum of personal grassroots PR, Keating's first full length solo album, *One Cello x 16: Natoma*, has hit number one on iTunes Classical on four separate occasions. Her latest solo offering, largely produced and recorded in her cabin home *deep in the woods* of Northern California, is aptly titled *Into the Trees*. It's a *stunning evolution* of Keating's same layer-and-loop concepts – a singular blend of warmth, mystery, and gentle strength. As her music deepens, so does her life: on May 13th, several weeks after this interview took place, Zoë and her husband Jeff Rusch welcomed their first child, a baby boy named Alex, into the world.

with

the
Zoë Keating

interview by
Meredith
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color photos by
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custom wardrobe courtesy of
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typography &
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Teagan White

You're connected to the world via the internet, and obviously quite technologically proficient to be composing such intricate, multi-layered music using various laptop programs. But then, on the other hand, you live in this log cabin out in the middle of nowhere, and you've said you go through periods where you turn all of your gadgets off, except for whatever computer programs you need for composing—Yeah, and I don't have a TV. I rarely see movies, or I see them long after they're released. And another thing: when I'm writing music, I don't listen to [any other] music because I am like a sponge. I love music so much that I will just soak it up and spit it back out without realizing it. I haven't actually listened to music for a year now, because I have been writing.

None?

None. Never. I can't handle it! When I'm at a party and there's music playing, every cell in my body latches onto the music. Without even realizing that I am doing it, I'm following along, I'm figuring it out, I'm composing countermelodies. I can't help tuning in. I will actually leave and go to another room to talk to people because I can't have a conversation and listen to music at the same time. It's pretty intense, like this strange handicap.

You used to do archiving at one point, didn't you? Back in the dot-com days, wasn't that a part of your job?

I was an information architect.

What exactly does that entail?

Well, information architects organize information so that people can do something with it. My specialty was digital archives: large repositories of digital pictures and digital objects like films, photographs of civil war uniforms, things like that. Historical objects. Information architecture is very focused on metadata, so if you have a photograph of a civil war uniform, it would have descriptors about it; that's the metadata. My job was thinking about how you might interact with a vast repository of academic archives. Dry for some people, but I find it very rich.

Dry? No way. Fascinating!

Yeah, I love history and I love connections between things, and in fact, when I'm not composing, I do a lot of reading, mostly history books. Take the Library of Congress and Smithsonian. They have these *huge* repositories of digital information. I really feel like if only there was the right interface for it, people would start to see the incredible connections between the modern day and the past. I find it comforting, somehow, when there are always these crappy things going on in the world, to think about what has happened in the past. Because then you can make sense of what's going on now. For example: the dot-com boom and Tulip Mania.

Tulip Mania?

Tulip Mania. Yeah, there's a great book called

Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds, by Philip McKay. I highly recommend it. It was written in the 1800s. I read it after the first dot-com crash and thought, if McKay was still alive I'm sure he would have included the crash in the book. Then, when the whole real estate bubble came around again, I was like, "Oh my god, it's Tulip Mania again, except that we have houses instead of tulips!" But people thought I was bonkers. Anyway, Tulip Mania: wealthy people were investing their entire fortunes in one single tulip bulb. Then, overnight, the market changed and suddenly they were left with nothing. There was a worldwide financial collapse.

Because of tulips?

Because people were investing everything in tulip bulbs, yeah! That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But substitute the word *tulip* with almost anything that's tanked in the last ten years, from dot-coms to condominiums. [laughter] So many of these things that happened in the past [are relevant] now, but people don't know about them. I used to think the role of an information architect was to bring that stuff to the surface so that people could make connections and be smarter about things they do in the present.

Please tell us a little bit about the new album.

Yes, it's called *Into the Trees*. That actually comes from a lyric in a Cure song, "A Forest." Very important song to me, growing up. It's mostly instrumental, which I really like, and it has the sort of driving feeling. Every album is about where I am at that moment, so this one is about moving into the forest – that feeling of fleeing the city – but I'm running into the trees, where it's kind of scary. In certain ways, it's very dark. What I like about using that Cure song title is that it's obscure enough that only a few people will get it. It's like a secret.

Even if they don't catch the reference, it's a compelling title. For human beings, there will always be this eternal mystery associated with a return to the forest.

“
here's a musical theme
running throughout the new album—
a sort of roaring, solemn sound in the
background, behind everything.
I call it the *Monolith Theme*.”

It's very primal out here, where I live. It isn't something we'd fully anticipated. My husband and I would go out of the city on weekend trips to the redwoods, but it's another thing to be here every day. You realize just how quiet it is, and haunting. I live in an area that used to look like Muir Woods, but it was all cut down in the 1880s. The stumps of these old trees are still here. I'm still surrounded by redwoods, but they are second, third growth. I'm very taken by what used to be here and probably will never be here again – by the ghosts of the forest.

It can be eerie, exploring the remnants of an old-growth forest. The logging leaves a deep scar on the land.

Absolutely. These were two-thousand-year-old trees they were chopping

down. Think of Muir Woods, and how amazing it is – that's just this tiny little sliver of what once was. The whole of the northwestern United States used to be covered in old-growth trees. Up here where I'm living, it's still a living redwood forest, but it's that messy third growth. Walking in a pristine, undamaged old-growth forest can feel like being in a cathedral: all of these vast, wide-open spaces. Whereas second- and third-growth redwood forests feel cluttered and dense, because all these little trees have begun sprouting up and growing around the stumps of the huge, dead, ancient trees. The story of those old trees has infiltrated everything I've been composing; it's like a shadow of what was here before. There's a musical theme running throughout the new album – a sort of roaring, solemn sound in the background, behind everything. I call it the Monolith Theme.

As a child, was cello was something you picked up because you wanted to do it?

When I first started playing, I didn't even know what it was called! One day in grade school, somebody just asked me if I wanted to play cello. I think it was because I was tall. That's the only explanation I have. [laughter]

Did you always want to continue playing, or did your parents and teachers have to force you to stick with it?

It never even occurred to me until I was in my teens that I could stop. I have this one memory. I was playing in the orchestra, and my stand partner was quitting. He said, "Well, I won't be back, because I am giving up cello." I was flabbergasted. I didn't understand how you could quit. [I thought] you might as well quit eating. That was never an option for me. Nobody ever *made* me play it, although sometimes I wish they had, because maybe I'd have better discipline. But I was very self-motivated. I felt that, if I were to quit, it would be like giving up part of my identity.

When you're a young classical student learning the canon, that musical identity often hinges on learning and performing music that was created by other people, most of whom are long-dead white dudes who wore powdered wigs. They aren't necessarily relevant to you on any immediate, personal level. For many classical players turned avant-garde, there's often this blinding revelation, usually in adolescence or early adulthood: "Oh, wait. I don't have to learn nothing but Bach and Mozart anymore if I don't want to. I can play other things." Nick Drake. Gamelan. Slayer. Anything! Was there ever such an epiphany for you?

Yeah, definitely. There certainly was. In my last year in high school, I'd started suffering from extreme stage fright. It was really, really, *really* bad, to the point where I could play something perfectly in my room, but then I would go out onto the stage to perform and fall to pieces. I went from being this promising student to asking myself, "Well, am I really going to do this?" I had definitely planned to become a professional classical musician. I wanted to be a conductor, actually. But with the stage fright, that wasn't possible. So I decided to go to Sarah Lawrence College instead of the Eastman School of Music. I started studying other things; I took an improvisation class and electronic music. Sarah Lawrence has this fantastic studio with a wall of old '60s and '70s patch-cord synthesizers. It was such a liberating world, whereas my world of solo cello had become really shut down. In the improvisation room, we played in a circle, there was a coach, it was *fun*. Meanwhile, I was also studying physics. You could build your own courses at Sarah Lawrence, so I had designed my own course on the physics of sound. I would spend hours in the studio observing sine waves and learning about acoustics – about how sound was constructed. [Eventually] I started improvising on my own and writing music for the first time. When I was improvising on the cello, I felt totally free. That was the beginning. Because that was so satisfying, I just kept at it [after college]. From 1996 through early 2000, I worked that dot-com job and moonlighted with rock bands ... I had a darkwave band called Alfred. We were very earnest, as you tend to be in your early twenties. I also played cello in an all-girl, power rock band called Van Gogh's Daughter. [When the dot-com bubble was about to burst and my company was sold off at the last minute] I got a little bit of

money. It wasn't a glorious pile of money, but it was enough that I didn't have to work for a year. I spent that time sorting out my music and did nothing but work on my own stuff. That was when I wrote my first *Cello x 16* piece, called "Exurgency." I didn't know a lot about recording. I had one microphone, and the recording was terrible. It took me a long time to painstakingly drag all the audio files around. But once I made that piece, my style happened almost immediately. That was it.

When did Rasputina come into the picture?

I guess it was 1998 or '99 when Melora Creager, the founder of the band – who had taken time off to have a baby – was putting the band back together. She put a callout on the Internet Ladies Cello Society and I answered "YES!" I sent her a CD – some recordings of Alfred, some other little bits of just me playing the cello, improvising and stuff. She wrote back and said, "Awesome. Come to New York." But I had just fallen in love with Jeff. You know, my baby daddy. [laughter] And I had just moved into the warehouse community he'd started. It was this great creative environment where everything started happening for me. San Francisco was finally working for me. I didn't want to move back to New York. So that was that. Then, two or three years later, the people that Melora had hired quit. She called me up again and said, "Hey, come play with us, and you don't have to move to New York." So I did. That was early 2002.

You had a pretty good run with them. Three, four years?

Yeah, I left the band in January of 2006.

You guys toured constantly during that time period, right?

We were doing a *lot*. Touring was everybody's source of income because there were no record sales, really. Already, by the early '00s, most bands weren't making a living off their records. Rasputina survived on show fees and merchandise. It was grueling. We tended to go out for three weeks, then take a break, then head out for another three weeks. Melora had a young daughter, and I think it was hard for her to be away from her any longer than that. The touring schedule was really good training for me. I felt like I was in finishing school. [laughter] I lost my stage fright once and for all. There's nothing like playing every single night in front of hundreds of people to help you get rid of stage fright. I realized that all I needed to do was perform all the time. But then, it always becomes hard for me not to contribute creatively to the things that I am involved in, and Melora was not necessarily open to anybody else contributing, because it was her project – which totally

works for her. But eventually I said, “Okay, I have gone long enough without doing *my own thing*.”

That must have been a huge step.

It took me a long time to find my voice, and then to be confident about that voice. It wasn’t until I was thirty that I really got started.

Speaking of huge steps, how’s pregnancy treating you?

Oh, very good, yeah! I look very much the same, except I have a soccer ball attached to my front. Jeff says that I look totally normal; he keeps forgetting that I’m pregnant, but then I turn to side and it looks like I’m wearing a pregnancy costume. Here’s an interesting thing: I feel more sane and calm than I ever have my entire life.

When you first discovered you were expecting, you said you were a bit uncertain about how to go about balancing motherhood with your busy creative life. Have you had some time to work through that?

It’s helped a lot that, when people have learned that I am pregnant, they still want to work with me. I have all these cool gigs coming up ... I’m playing at TED Global in Oxford in July. Then, in August, I have a big production at the Colorado Festival, which is a thousand-seat venue. We’re doing a full ballet; I play my music live, and they dance. I had some idea that they wouldn’t want to work with me after I became a mom. I know, it sounds ridiculous. Of course they were totally fine with the baby and putting extra time in the schedule. Once I realized everything would continue – that it would just be a bit different from now on – that made me feel a lot better. And I am so lucky to have such a supportive partner. He works at home, too. This just means that, when I go on tour now, I have to see if Jeff wants to come, and if that works around his schedule, because obviously we both have to go. But it seems like it’s going to work, so it’s good. I’m not frightened about it now. I am ready, finally.

Hooray! The world needs more happy, nurtured babies with responsible bohemian parents.

I hope so! To counteract all those Quiverfull people; you know about them? [laughter] There is this family that lives somewhere in the vast middle of America; they’re called the Duggars. They’re always showing up in the news because they have eighteen children.

Aaahh! Not that “VAGINA: IT’S NOT A CLOWN CAR” family? What?!

Oh, dear ... Google it. Twenty bucks says that’s them.

Well, the Duggar family believes that children are God’s gift, so they just have to keep popping them out no matter what. They’re hardcore Christians; it’s this whole movement. Their goal is to populate America with radical Christian children, because they know that a lot of liberals only have maybe one, if any. I am *not* making this up. They call themselves the Quiverfull because they have a quiver full of arrows. Get it? So, I’ve been thinking, maybe it’s my duty for the future of rational, reasonable society to raise children to, I dunno, to counteract these fundies. Then again,

kids aren’t easily controllable. It may be that children from all of these Quiverfull families will rebel and become black-clad, crazy radicals. [laughter]

Wow. That’s ... wow, Zoë. [laughter] Okay, moving on, from Quiverfull to Twitterrific. You have, through a series of random events, ended up accruing well over 1,300,000 followers on the social networking hub Twitter. Wil Wheaton and Neil Gaiman (who, incidentally, you’re rubbing elbows with in this issue) gave you props, and then you ended up on some official “must follow” list, and suddenly, bam! You’re an internet celebrity. Celebritwit! [laughter]

Has the sudden increase in exposure and attention changed anything?

You know, it’s not really a big deal, obviously. At first it seemed like it might be, but I realized very quickly that it’s not. Maybe that’s just my way to handle it: pretending everything’s the same, that I’m still only talking to a small handful of people. I love the irony of me being considered famous. It’s so hilarious! I like to imagine that the people on Twitter who put me on their suggested users list think that it’s funny too. I think that everything in popular culture and the media is just one big suggested users list. Everybody is selected or chosen by someone. There’s this total myth of a meritocracy, when really it’s about who you meet and where. [The whole situation] cracks me up.

Revenge of the nerds.

I take a lot of glee in that. Then again, it does so happen that Twitter’s a good communication medium for me because I’m kind of irreverent and kind of goofy ... yet serious. [laughter] It’s a good way for me to be connected and express myself in a way that seems natural. But there have been some definite downsides that I never anticipated: I have to filter a lot more stuff from people who don’t know me. I’ve had some weird “Oh my god, you must be famous” reactions from people. They behave differently. I’ll be in a room with someone, having some fun conversation at a party ... they look on Twitter, see how many

followers I have and, from then on, treat me totally differently. It’s awful. I hate it. Often I don’t want people to know about it, because it changes my relationships. Meanwhile, personally, I feel like I’m still obscure, and it’s just this number that means nothing. Also, there are companies and businesses who want to send me things with the hope that I will mention them on Twitter. I say, “Listen, go ahead and send it to me, thanks, but I’m not going to necessarily say anything, and I don’t think that one million followers means what you think it does!”

‘I’m very taken by what used to be here and probably will never be here again, by the ghosts of the forest.’

The popularity contest aspect of it does seem to be creating a certain signal-to-noise ratio. It’s not necessarily healthy. A lot of people, from relatively obscure users all the way up to über-celebs, seem to be buying into this obsessive collector’s mentality. “Gotta catch ‘em all!” As if amassing as many followers as possible will somehow validate their existence – and that’s human.

It’s very human, but then again, watching people clamor for popularity on Twitter can also feel a bit like being back in junior high. Oh, *totally*.

The middle school reference is right on, and again, that’s the ironic thing about someone like me, the unpopular kid in the corner, getting singled out. [laughter] But I do feel like things will settle down eventually. Twitter mania’s like anything else. I don’t get hung up on it. It’s not the most important thing in my life, and I know it might go away tomorrow.

Obviously, having survived the dot-com crash, you know how quickly these things can shift.

Absolutely. I have very little faith in a lot of this stuff sticking around. In fact, it came up recently with an internet company called ReverbNation. I was looking for someone to digitally distribute my next album with a company that doesn’t take a percentage, and ReverbNation looked like a good possibility. But accounting and reporting is really important. I need that for my taxes, and I need to know how many tracks I’m selling. ReverbNation was only offering their accounting online. When you have 180,000 downloads, you shouldn’t have to sift through their little interfaces, figuring out how to save it to a text file somewhere. But then, more recently, I chatted with one of the founders, and now it’s looking like they’ll be offering downloadable reports.

Whoa, wait. 180,000? That’s the ballpark number of mp3 downloads you’ve sold so far?

Yes. If you were to divide them evenly, it would be something like 15,000 records. Approximately ninety percent of the sales are iTunes. I get to keep 70 cents of every download.

That’s no small chunk o’ change.

Yeah, it’s great. I’m trying to talk about this stuff a lot, actually. I just want musicians to know: hey, you can do it on your own. When there are no middlemen, you don’t have to sell a ton to start doing pretty well.

I’m guessing you’re probably making more money than a lot of signed musicians do, even if they have five times the record sales.

Oh, absolutely, and that’s just digital sales. If you include physical sales, that’s 30,000 copies or so. And it’s all money that I’ve gotten to keep myself. Putting it all in perspective: I got about \$2,000 for my work on *Frustration Plantation*. Obviously, Melora made a little bit more, but still. When I was in the band, she got this hilarious letter from her label that said something like, “Congratulations, you have almost paid off the \$75,000 you owe us, and then you will start getting royalties off for your first album.” Seventy-five thousand dollars.

Ouch. No wonder the system’s falling apart.

I don’t know why most people would want to sign record deals at this point. When I first started doing this, I made my EP with the idea that I would do what other baby bands do: send it to labels and hopefully get signed. Most of these labels sent back very polite rejections. They’d say, “This is very interesting music, but it has no market. We don’t know how to sell it. It doesn’t fit anywhere.” At the time, I was very grateful to get



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those responses, but I was bummed out that nobody was interested. So I said, “Okay, well, I guess I’ll just do it all myself.” Nowadays, some of those very same labels – really well-known labels, actually – are contacting me, saying they’ll negotiate a really good deal with me. They say that they’ll give me *half*. Riiiiight.

That’d be a big step down for you at this point, wouldn’t it?

Yeah, and I don’t seriously believe that they can get me a wider audience. Not to mention that I make a lot of my income from licensing. I would lose half my publishing if I were to be on a record label.

Doesn’t it feel good to see how many of the good-hearted freaks and oddballs who struggled growing up, but stayed true to ourselves, are thriving now? We’re all finding (or forging) these odd little niches, both on and offline. There’s this camaraderie that has developed among those who just decided to embrace our indie outsider nerd-dom and run with it. We have each other’s backs.

Yeah, it would be funny to define this specific kind of nerd-dom. It’s an interesting quality that doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with computers. A lot of the people I end up being friends with are just curious about things outside themselves and interested in a lot of different subjects, yet have this strange sort of focused mania about certain things as well. It’s a balance of critical thinking and obsessive absorption. It pays off.

You’ve truly become a punk rock/DIY/nerd warrior poster child. Congratulations. We are in the golden era of dorks. It’s wonderful.

photography assistance
Audrey Penven

makeup
Lisa Strutz

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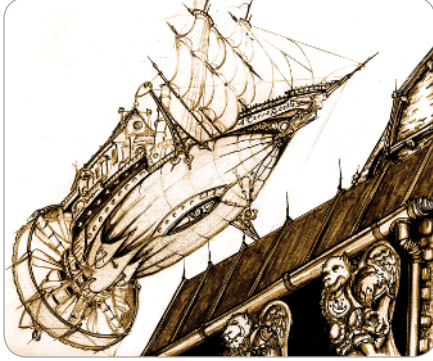
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+ CHET ZAR'S

VULNERABLE MONSTERS

At a glance, Chet Zar's stunning paintings present portraits of monsters set against imposing post-apocalyptic landscapes. Look closer and you'll smile, sensing a certain camaraderie with the expressive mouths and snouts, seemingly protruding from their realm of barren hills, billowing smoke stacks and deserted highrises. Pause for a while and you might feel hot wind on your face and catch a whiff of burning oil. Passion for darkness, decay, flesh, and all its nuance mingles with passion for the painting medium itself, creating unforgettable works of art.

Chet's distinct vision got him noticed around the LA gallery circuit, and his presence in the Pop Surrealism genre was cemented by keen technical ability - refined by twenty years spent weaving special effects makeup magic. His work has been part of Planet of the Apes, The Ring, X-Men III, Men in Black, and Hellboy, among many others, yet it was only a few years ago that Chet decided to pursue fine art full time. The transition took some encouragement, and he credits Clive Barker,



serendipitously also featured in this issue, among those who helped him fully embrace painting.

Remarkable circumstances, like Barker's appearance in this issue, are familiar to Chet, whose life has been continually influenced by the meditation and visualization skills he learned in his childhood. Today, these are the skills that keep him grounded despite his well-earned whirlwind success. Chet's calm, genuine demeanor makes him a refreshing presence in what can be an abrasive art scene. This air of sincerity, and also unrepentant humor, shines in his paintings, making it easy to identify with the painted monsters, no matter how irksome or sinister they might first appear.

Though we might hesitate to perceive Chet Zar's doomed landscapes as familiar, we can't help but recognize the simple, compelling emotions of his characters, thus receiving the hidden message of laughter and, perhaps, empathy.

INTRODUCTION AND INTERVIEW BY ZOETICA EBB



You credit your family for providing an environment that nurtured your love of art, horror movies, and monsters. Your father is surrealist painter James Zar, whose studio made you love the painting process early on, and your mother taught you to meditate and supported your childhood experiments with horror makeup. Could you tell us more about her?

She’s the best. I don’t ever remember her discouraging my strange interests in any way. She was very nurturing, especially regarding my artwork. She is also a big animal lover, so I think I picked that up from her. We always had a ton of animals around because she could never turn away a stray dog or cat.

She was always a very open-minded, compassionate, live-and-let-live kind of person. I remember her telling me that I could draw whatever I wanted with no limits. She implanted the idea in my mind very early that art was about creative expression and freedom. I was lucky in that way. A lot of artists didn’t get that kind of encouragement when they were young.

My mom has a lot artistic talent herself. She was always dabbling in some form of art, drawing, painting, or whatever. She is now a great writer and writes a really funny blog at recklesspinner2.blogspot.com.

Which childhood experiences honed your love of creepiness the most?

My mom tells me about a time when I was about three years old and was terrified of spiders. So she took me to the library and got a book on spiders, and we looked at it together and learned about spiders. After that I wasn’t afraid. I think it was that kind of attitude that helped me to embrace things that were scary and creepy to me. Of course a steady diet of horror movies on TV helped.

One thing that made an impression on me when I was really young was when my grandfather would turn out all the lights in the house and chase my siblings and I around wearing this creepy old caveman mask. It was absolutely terrifying, but that’s the kind of guy he was. He was really into practical jokes, some bordering on sadistic. But, I dunno, I lived through it and here I am today.

You often talk about the power of meditation and visualizing the future to get positive results. What was your very first successful experience with creative visualization?

When I was a kid (maybe nine or ten), my mom taught me how to do it. Sometimes when we were broke (my dad being a full-time artist), my mom would tell me that if I visualized a painting selling and it sold, she would buy me something. So I would go off into my room and hold the image of a painting selling in my mind, and pretty soon after, a painting would sell and I would get a toy or something. As I got older and needed art supplies, I would visualize for money and it would always come, and usually in strange and unexpected ways. This is something I have seen work over and over again in my own life, so at this point I just accept it as some kind of cosmic law.

How have your experiences with drugs and your active spiritual development affected your life outside of art?

I had some intense experiences with psychedelics when I was a young

man. (I acknowledge that they are not for everyone.) I had read a lot of eastern philosophy and shamanism, so my motives were pure. I never did psychedelics to party. My intentions were spiritual discovery and self-exploration. I really got a lot out of it. What it mainly did for me was confirm what I had already sensed my entire life: that there is more to life than meets the eye, that death is nothing to fear, and that God is real. When I say “God,” I’m not talking about a man in the sky with a beard; I am talking about a vast spiritual intelligence beyond our understanding. I don’t really have a problem using that term, but I understand why a lot of people don’t like it. I think it’s because so many fundamentalist Christians are total assholes. They kind of ruined a lot of religious symbolism for those of us who actually like to think about things intelligently. But I do believe there are core truths to religion in a mythological and symbolic sense. Anybody interested in this idea should check out Joseph Campbell’s *The Power of Myth*, and anybody interested in psychedelics should read Terence McKenna’s work.

Your parents’ open-mindedness and encouragement has impacted you in a powerfully positive way. How do you handle your children’s spiritual development? Have you tackled the topic of drugs with them, or do you plan to?

My kids are pretty much grown up now, and I talked to them about drugs early.

I was honest, you know, in the past I have done certain drugs for certain reasons. Some are more dangerous than others, some you should never fuck with. I was at least able to say I didn’t drink or try any drugs until I was eighteen (true).

As far as their spiritual development went, I never pushed them into anything. I told them my feelings about spirituality, offered guidance if they needed it, but mostly just tried to help them develop their own beliefs. I think it’s important that spiritual beliefs are rooted in the person’s experience if they are to mean anything.

You spent the first ten years of your career working in film as a makeup effects artist. With all that industry experience under your belt, making your own movies can’t be all that far off. Do you have any immediate cinematic plans?

It’s definitely something I would love to do, and I know I could do, given the opportunity. It’s something I have wanted to do since making films as a kid, and it is always in the back of my mind. I hope to really develop my ideas as I get a little more time. I might try and take it easy in 2011 so that I can focus on this and a few other side projects. I have one film idea in particular that I would like to do that I think my fans would love.

What would your film’s universe look like?

An industrial post-apocalyptic surrealist nightmare world with zombies. The slow kind. Zombies are not supposed to run in my book. I’m old school when it comes to that.

In addition to your visual art, you’re also an experienced musician; would you contribute to the score of your movie? What would it sound like?

I would. I’m a guitar player but have always been a big analog synthesizer fan. When I was a kid, I saved up my money and bought a Realistic (Radio Shack brand) synthesizer. It was their version of a Mini Moog. I loved the



sounds that came out of that thing. I still have it. In any case, I think if I scored my film it would be primarily analog synth stuff.

Your success in the LA art scene came about quickly, once you set out to pursue fine art. Were there any bumps in the road that you can look back at now and laugh?

It was all bumps, and mostly all funny! I was working around the clock, holding down a full-time job in the day and painting at night, driving around town to pick up supplies and get things framed, driving to shows to drop off work...I don’t know how I did it. I was lucky that my wife and family were supportive, because it was totally ridiculous. There was no social life at all, other than art shows. I look at the whole thing now and laugh.

Is there anything you dislike about being an artist? What are some the aspects of this field that you find challenging?

The biggest challenge is making enough money. It’s tough. Last year was a real bitch for art sales. I still don’t feel that I am getting what my paintings are worth. I really toil over ‘em. They take tremendous amounts of time and energy. But the freedom is definitely worth it, so I’m not complaining...too much.

You tend to use certain cycling elements in your work: cigarettes, distorted eyes [or no eyes at all], towering chimneys, and somber apocalyptic landscapes. These things have become part of your visual vocabulary. What specific imagery in art, film, and literature stimulated you most? What’s your favorite horror iconography?

I grew up on horror films, *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines. The covers for the latter especially inspired me. I am surprised more people haven’t made the connection because I feel that my work is probably most influenced by those magazine covers.

When it comes to film, it was always the really crappy, low-budget horror films that inspired me. Even now I love those old horror movies from the ‘60s and ‘70s, the grainy look of the film, the bad acting. They had the feel of vintage news footage to me. There was a kind of creepy realism there, kind of like watching old super 8 home movies. My favorite horror iconography would be zombies, ghosts, and haunted houses. I’ve always preferred supernatural horror over the serial killer stuff.

As far as literature goes, I was a big reader as a kid. I loved reading Stephen King, Clive Barker, Edgar Allen Poe. Horror literature seemed so rebellious and against the mainstream to me that I felt an immediate kinship with it.

What’s the significance of smoking in your artwork?

I am not one hundred percent sure. As with most of my symbolism, it developed from an intuitive aesthetic impulse. Once I had started thinking about why I would feel compelled to include it in so many paintings, a couple of things came to mind. One was the old *Mad* magazine cartoons I used to read. A lot of the weird characters from *Mad* would be smoking cigarettes, especially the little cartoons in

+

Crybaby

between the margins of the page panels by the great Sergio Aragones. Finding those little doodles were like finding little gems for me. And very often the characters would be smoking, or at least that’s how I remember it. *Mad* magazine was a big influence on me growing up.

The other thing that came to mind was the humanizing quality that a cigarette brings. I see my characters as otherworldly, so I like to add things that keep them grounded, so to speak. Adding that element of a cigarette makes them a little more human, and kind of flawed and even vulnerable (in the sense that smokers are addicted). Cigarettes can also symbolize anxiety. People smoke when they are nervous, and a lot of my creatures appear to be worried about something, so it kind of fits.

I also grew up in the ‘70s, which was a time when everyone smoked. Smoking was definitely all around me as a kid, and at their very core these paintings are a reflection of who I am, how I feel, and my own personal life experiences. On a strictly aesthetic note, I love to paint smoke!

Now all of this is me analyzing this after the fact. Like I said, I go by my intuition when it comes to my artwork. I usually leave it up to other people to figure out what it all means. To me, understanding the symbolism of my own work is not really that important. One of the cool things about keeping things vague and open to interpretation is that it allows the viewer to create their own meaning about a work, and in turn the painting becomes more important to them personally.

You also relish rendering deformities, hyper-detailed tissue, and emphasized bone structure. Besides human flesh, do you have any textures that inspire you?

I find the natural patterns of decay, like rust and weathered wood, endlessly inspiring. This kind of gets to the crux of the issue regarding appreciation of dark art. These things can be really beautiful without the negative connotations we normally associate them with. It’s a way to transcend fear, ugliness, and ultimately death.

Have you had any personal experience with death?

We had my mother-in-law live with us while she was in hospice. We were with her while she died. It was very intense, but at the same time it felt very...right.

It was really an honor to be able to be there for her. It’s a strange thing; you really feel that the person is not there once they are dead. There is a completely different vibe once they go. It felt like she left the room and it reinforced my belief in a soul.

Do you have any ultimate goals you strive toward? What’s your dream project? There are only two things that come to mind: an art show featuring all my sculpture work and directing that “industrial post-apocalyptic surrealist nightmare world with zombies” film I mentioned. I have some ideas for it, and am slowly starting to organize it into a cohesive story. The environment would be populated with characters from my paintings – and there would be much bloodshed.





The Pink Scream

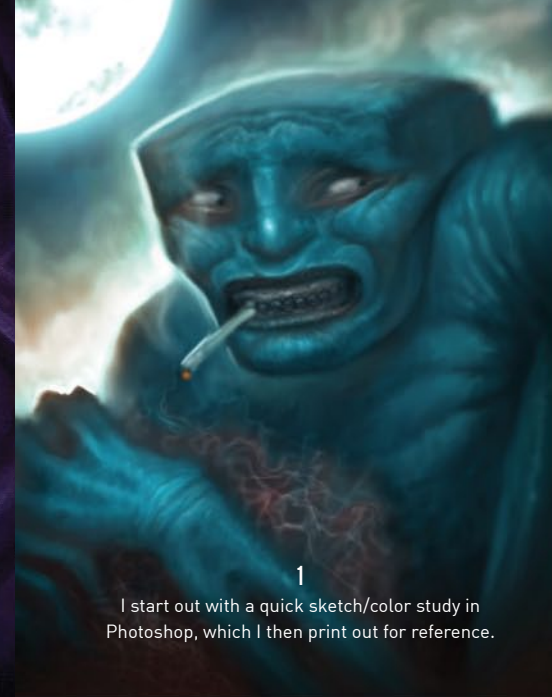


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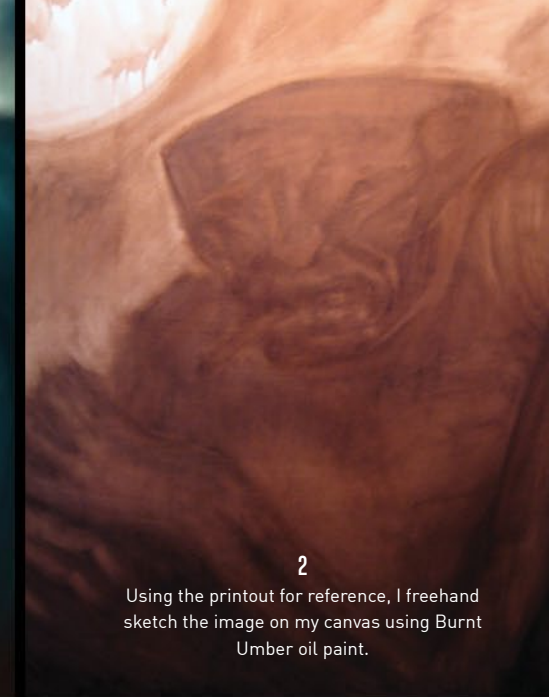


Lilith

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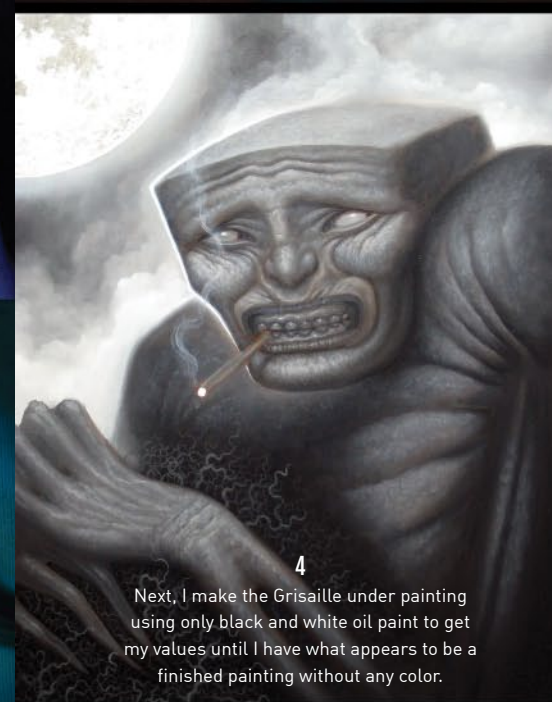
1
I start out with a quick sketch/color study in Photoshop, which I then print out for reference.



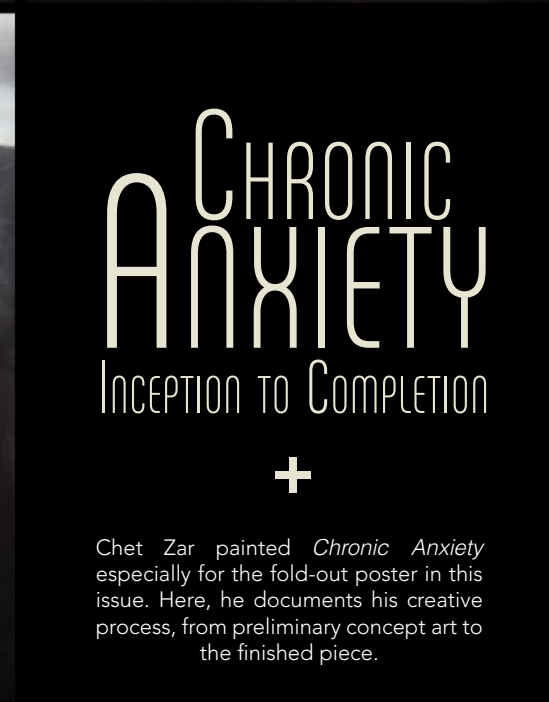
2
Using the printout for reference, I freehand sketch the image on my canvas using Burnt Umber oil paint.



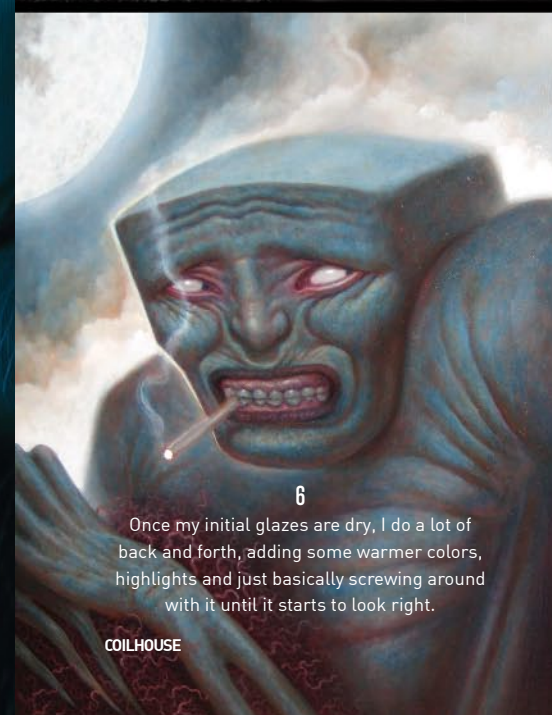
3
The main forms are blocked out.



4
Next, I make the Grisaille under painting using only black and white oil paint to get my values until I have what appears to be a finished painting without any color.

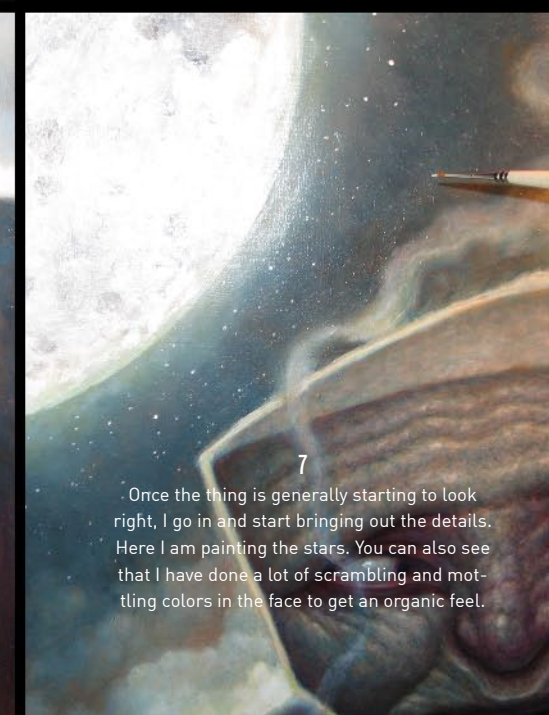


5
Now I start glazing transparent color over the whole thing.



6
Once my initial glazes are dry, I do a lot of back and forth, adding some warmer colors, highlights and just basically screwing around with it until it starts to look right.

COILHOUSE



7
Once the thing is generally starting to look right, I go in and start bringing out the details. Here I am painting the stars. You can also see that I have done a lot of scrambling and mottling colors in the face to get an organic feel.



8
I also add some texture to the planet by mixing some oil paint with Zec (a dense medium that adds a lot of body to the paint) and applying it with a palette knife.

67

CHRONIC ANXIETY

INCEPTION TO COMPLETION



Chet Zar painted *Chronic Anxiety* especially for the fold-out poster in this issue. Here, he documents his creative process, from preliminary concept art to the finished piece.



CLIVE BARKER

Celebration, Remembrance, Prophecy

Clive Barker's desire to be remembered as an imaginer of universes feeds his creative drive in a way that borders on the overwhelming. Single-handedly changing the ideascapes of mainstream horror and dark fantasy with books such as *Imajica*, *The Hellbound Heart* (filmed as *Hellraiser*), and *The Books of Blood*, Barker already achieved tremendous success in the late eighties and early nineties – but for him, it was merely the start of a journey to the heart of the unknown. Building the empire of self in order to give humanity a chance to expand its perception is a goal worthy of a mastermind – and Barker, like his hero, Renaissance man Jean Cocteau, is nothing less.

Knowing Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* is Clive Barker's favorite book might be the key to understanding him as a creator. The way Ahab kills his enemy and dies with it reminds us of both the banality of evil and the majestic beauty of our world. There are forces bigger than us, and if we succumb to our negativity, they will drag us down and drown us until the last breath leaves our bodies. Instead of being awed by the extraordinary white colossus, the captain decided to hunt it down, abandoning imagination and immersing himself in destruction. Perhaps Clive Barker understands that Ahab's true enemy was Ahab himself. Imagine Barker standing exactly where the insane captain once stood, ready to kill his supposed nemesis – but instead of spearing the whale in front of him, Clive Barker winks at it, and *Moby Dick* winks back.

"All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever present perils of life." *Moby Dick* – Herman Melville

It is the realization of this swift, sudden turn of death that permeates every incarnation of Clive Barker's work. Emerging from his theatrical past, Barker's stories feel influenced by both Shakespeare and the ancient Greeks. More often than not, the main protagonists beat the odds and save themselves, but sometimes entities bigger than them triumph instead, wreaking havoc and misery.

When looking into the eyes of such an entity, you understand there are no boundaries for your imagination. It sets you free – and nothing could be truer for Barker, who, apart from being an author for more than twenty-five years, is also a vastly productive, passionate painter, photographer, and filmmaker. His immense art studio brims with with literally thousands of paintings whose subjects range from raw puzzles of animal, human, and otherworldly anatomy to carefully rendered fantastic beings and landscapes from his books. The longer you look at them and feel the frenzied, tenacious energy that drives Barker, the better you understand his primary purpose: creating worlds where Ahabs and Moby Dicks coexist in harmony.



Introduction
ALES KOT

Interview
ALES KOT &
ZOETICA EBB

You've been writing for nearly thirty years. Do you still manage to genuinely surprise yourself with new stories and themes? Absolutely. I don't approach my work until I know that I don't know anything about it. It has to be a mystery to me. It has to be like a puzzle. This is what happened with my new *Hellraiser* book, so I didn't announce it at all – I waited until I had a draft, and didn't say anything about it, because I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to surprise myself. And damn, did I surprise myself! Now, I don't want to spoil anything so I can't say much about it, but...

(Clive writes the book's name on a piece of paper and asks us to not publish it.)

When the title appeared, I knew I could surprise myself, because I had no idea what the fuck the plot would be about. If I looked at the title and knew the plot from the start to the finish, I would probably have given up on the project. I work seven days a week. Yesterday I worked fourteen hours; today I'll do roughly the same. And if I'm supposed to sit behind my desk for fourteen hours, I better be getting something out of it besides a sore back. I love to find the little roads and back alleys in my imagination that I didn't know were there. [Barker pauses and looks at me.] Are you laughing at the idea of my back alleys? The truth is, at the age of fifty-seven, I am still a stranger to my own mind. And as long as I remain a stranger, without a map, I'm gonna have fun.

That might be what you're building with your art: an extension of your mind.

I think you're on to something. The imagination is the primary fractal experience, and if I'm correct, fractals go both ways. And the reason why my favorite symbol in the world is a spiral – I even have a spiral staircase in my house, over four stories – is that the spiral takes you from a microcosm to a macrocosm without breaking the line. To me, there's something very beautiful in the idea that we can move from the miniature to the

vast without turning a corner. The line is established, and goes on, and goes on. It's the shape of galaxies, of a lock of curly hair. It would be nice if black holes, the unmaking of the world, took the same form as the making: a spiral.

Dividing my
PASSION FEELS LIKE PUTTING
MY HAND BETWEEN DOGS WHO ARE
Battling for Supremacy.

Unmaking the world brings us back to your *Hellbound Heart* sequel. What can you tell us about it?

Devil's Island. Pinhead is on the Devil's Island because Lemarchand, who made the Lament Configuration, was imprisoned there. It's modern day now – there's no one. The whole prisoners' colony came down in the '50s. It was the shame of the French. They were ashamed that they still have this terrible place where people have been dying at a horrible rate. They shut it down and left everything there – left the jungle to take it all away. I was trying to find a place for Pinhead to reside, and Devil's Island just seemed perfect. Does that excite your imagination?

It does. I read *The Hellbound Heart* when I was ten or eleven and loved it, so I'm very excited about what might be coming next. Wow, ten or eleven? That's awesome. What did your parents think about that?

They always encouraged me to read a lot and were very open-minded, so it was

perfectly fine. Speaking of children, I know you're working on new Abarat books. How is that going?

This is all one world, the same landscape, and it doesn't matter whether it's for kids, adults, PG-13 or R-rated – it's always from the same place. It's always a celebration of imagination in the end, however scary, intimidating, or weird it gets. Thank god it gets weird, because I feel like the world is getting more normal. We're in the hands of men who are normalizing us, these large bureaucracies, these large monopolies, systems and architectures owned by the Murdocks of this world. It's huge. The number of media Murdoch is talking through...We are being spoken to – we are being trained – like Pavlov's dogs in ways we can't even calculate, and it's all getting faster.

Some of the information is speeding up, and we might not be comprehending what's in that information. That's what worries me.

The Art Trilogy, your multi-tome tale of superhumans and alternate planes of existence, was supposed to be finished before the end of the twenty-first century. Do you still plan to finish it or have you lost interest in that story?

It's planned, and it's huge, and it's two years of my life. My life is like musical chairs. I'm constantly trying to find out where do I fit this and that – the paintings, the movies, the books, the photography. I love doing all these things, but boy, they take some arranging. I would say, "I'll start it next year, but don't quote me [laughs]."

In your studio you have an overwhelming amount of paintings, sketches, inks, and so on. What drives you to create in such quantity?

I didn't have a point of reference as a kid. I didn't know any painters. I didn't know



any artists, so there was never a sense of “Ah, that’s the right number of pictures to make.” I don’t make sketches to copy from; I don’t sketch on the canvas. It just happens. Sometimes it’s shit; sometimes it’s good.

Another thing is that I couldn’t make movies the way the movies are now made. I would get bored so quickly. You have to work with the computer people, sit in endless meetings and wait for them to do their job. Boring as fuck. I don’t have the soul for that. What drives me is a fever to make, to originate, to be the originator. To have somebody else do it for me is like having somebody else jerk me off...Actually, that’s kind of nice. I’ll try to think of another analogy! It’s like not feeling anything, and art is all about feeling. And when you do this prepping, and storyboarding...Brian De Palma used to say, “When you do the storyboarding, the movie is made.” And god that’s awful – to do the stuff that has already been done in your head over and over. That’s what a big part of cinema is right now: all these large-scale big-studio spectacles. Hopefully they’re balanced by all the small independent movies being made elsewhere.

How do you divide your passion between several disciplines?

It’s like a dog fight. I have seven dogs, and four of them had a fight last night. It was in my office, at night. Two German shepherds and one mutt and one cocker spaniel. When I caught all four of them fighting together, I got messed up a little bit. You can see it on my hand. That’s what it feels like to divide my passion. Like you’re putting your hand between these dogs who are battling for supremacy. My passion for painting is fierce, and so is my passion for writing, and so is my passion for photography. There are not many people who are “Ivy Leagues,” and I admire them; I admire Cocteau. There’s always the danger you won’t get respected for something new you do, because it’s thought to be an adulterance.

“Oh, don’t take him seriously. He does like twelve different things” – I encounter that, and I don’t think it’s going to go away until I die.

Movies, paintings, books, photography...

My agent once said, “This is a high-class problem,” and it’s true. I’m not complaining, trust me!

It’s just that sometimes, it would be nice to not have to fight for the attention. And in this world, the world of publicity machines and all the other crap, you do have to fight for the attention. When I started painting oil paintings for kids, people were like, “Why are you trying?” and I said, “Well, because I think they’ll like them,” and they said, “But kids don’t even go into dark alleys, because they’re scared of them,” and I thought they were wrong. Kids don’t get exposed to oil painting at all in this country. My ex-partner’s daughter got no

exposure to art at all. It’s a brave new world, and it’s a scary new world. The rules are being written as we go, and we’re the ones writing them.

You have said that painting gives you a direct connection between imagination and medium. What about comics, then? Have you thought about drawing and writing your own comic book?

To me, comics don’t have that much of an audience. I want to reach a large audience, and comics still, regrettably, reach a tiny audience, mostly male, mostly urban. If I was reaching men and women equally, as I do with my paintings and with my books, no problem.

It’s just frustrating – I would give a year of my life to do a comic, and I would never reach the audience I want to reach. When I went into comics, they were selling in ridiculous numbers, and they went down. The publishers did that to themselves. They were greedy.

In addition to writing and painting, you’re also a passionate photographer. What do you love the most about photography?

Its immediacy. Having the relationship with a model who brings his own ideas, his own energy, his own sexuality into the shoot. Painting and writing are both very lonely businesses, and I love the fact that photography is a marriage of minds. I usually deal with people who don’t model, so they bring their own freedom to the shoot. The earliest photography I have of myself is from when I was nineteen, which is thirty-eight years ago. I’ve always done it. Always erotic. Never done landscapes.

How do you feel your photography has evolved?

My job doesn’t involve critiquing. I don’t judge, I don’t think, I don’t calculate – I do. My job is not to worry about where my strengths are; my job is to follow my gut, and if it’s shit, somebody else will tell me. I’m not gonna sit around and think about that. Life is way too short as it is.

So you don’t look back at all?

No, not at all. In fact, I write an entire novel, always, without ever reading the page before. Then, when it’s done, after a year or so, I read the whole thing. It stops you from being self-conscious, it stops you from analyzing, it stops you wishing to have done this or that. Bigger that – just do it.

Don’t dream it, be it. Erase the part of yourself that’s eating at your confidence. I’ve always been this way. And it isn’t confidence that does it; it’s the lack of confidence. Its roots are in incredible lack of self-esteem. I know that if I went back and looked at the pages right now, I would just give up. So I simply don’t do it. It’s like going into a room where you know is a monster – you just don’t go in. And it works for me. It wouldn’t work for everybody, but it works for me.

Many of your stories deal with alternate universes. How did that start? Do you think you might be channeling some of your adrenalized creative juice from parallel planes of existence?

The universes I and you live in are not the same universes. Maybe they’re intersecting in places, but mostly they are not. We do stupid things, in the way we treat the world and the people in it. One of these stupid things is the assumption that we all understand and live by the same laws. We don’t. Blake says, “Make your own laws or be a slave to another man’s.” I live by that. My houses are a testament to that – I built them from writing books and making horror movies! To the extent that I can, I want to make little universes of their own. I believe, after death, there’s gonna be a bunch of new universes to be found, and that’s going to be pretty exciting too. I love the options available.

Do you think you’ll ever reach a point when there are no stories left to tell?

Oh Christ, no. The reason being, they’ve all been told. It’s all about retelling with new nuance, through a new point of view. Our lives are changing all the time. When Justin died, my life changed beyond all recognition, and my job now is to write out of that place. My job now is to write out of his absence. Making art is part act of celebration, part act of remembrance, part act of prophecy. In the ideal world, you’re doing all three at the same time.



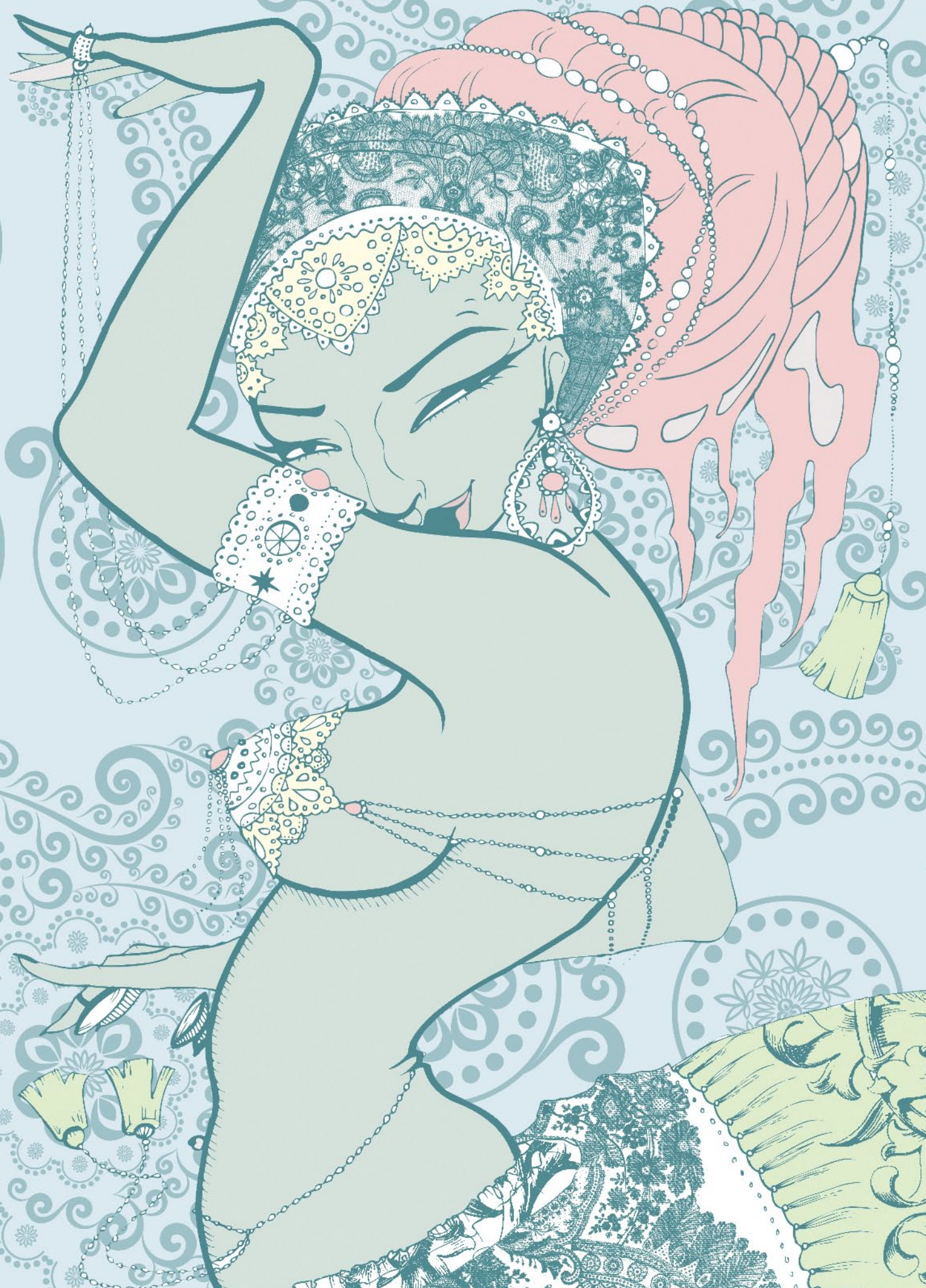
“MAKING ART IS PART ACT OF CELEBRATION, PART ACT OF REMEMBRANCE, PART ACT OF PROPHECY. IN AN IDEAL WORLD, YOU’RE DOING ALL THREE AT THE SAME TIME.”



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“How rare it is to find a party that transcends any one scene, where burners, hipsters, nerds, punks, queers, goths, and all the beautiful and (thankfully) unclassifiable freaks can get together without a trace of pretension or scorn.”

Gadjo Disko, page 90

ILLUSTRATION Zoetica Ebb

Infect

SHOE LUST, A MYTH

AUTHOR
ZOETICA EBB

PHOTOGRAPHY
ANDREW YOON



COILHOUSE

#1 YOU ARE NOT WHO YOU WEAR

The internet is brimming with implausibly cheap shoe sites, and it can be tempting to binge. If you find yourself trapped at your computer, transfixed by a virtual shopping cart with five pairs for a hundred bucks, I humbly suggest you wipe the sweat from your noble brow, close the browser, and go to a shoe store instead. When you're in your sixties and want to wear stylish shoes, your healthy feet will thank me. This applies to high-end shopping sites, too. Whether it's a coveted pair of Grand Nationals or exquisite Victorian granny boots found on eBay for close to nothing, shoes of the wrong size and fit are just not worth it. The only way to ensure comfort is to take your time while shopping in person.

#3 WALK THE WALK WELL

An outfit is the only thing shoes have the power to complete; dropping hundreds of dollars on them has yet to actually revolutionize anyone's life. Brand obsession helps no one but the brand, comrades. Foot binding, now mercifully out of vogue in China, was around for one thousand years. This practice left women permanently hobbled in order to demonstrate their nobility—not entirely different from the folks suffering in ill-fitting designer shoes today. The myth of pricey name brands always fitting better and lasting longer is just that—a myth, like Bloody Mary or the Loch Ness monster. Though the chances of scoring a comfortable pair of shoes are higher with expensive brands, they're still only chances. I've owned twenty dollar shoes that were more comfortable than three hundred dollar ones. As much as certain brands' trademark platforms or buckles might attract, comfort remains the number one priority when shoe shopping, which brings us to the second principle.

#2 ALWAYS SHOP IN PERSON

To those who have chosen to fully embrace shoes and their many delightful incarnations: master the craft of wearing high heels. Too often, novices look like wobbly kneed baby deer, a far cry from the powerful, refined image heels are meant to evoke. It's easiest to start low, two to three inches at most, and then work up as high as your heart desires. Wear your heels at home to break them in and get a bit of practice; there's nothing like a little light cleaning in a pair of stilettos. You'll want to learn feline poise and be aware of where you're stepping at all times. Just think of it as ninja training. Lastly, it helps to keep flats on hand. With purse sizes being what they are these days, there is no reason not to. Even the most veteran of heel-walkers get tired and sore at the end of the day.



COILHOUSE



Portland-based graphic designer Nubby Twiglet's personal style is a lot like her portfolio—all about black, white, and red, minimal, with a few bold flourishes. Her shoe-sorting technique is best described as a direct opposite of mine, and her pristine shoe shelves almost make me question my methods.

N

NUBBY TWIGLET says...

My love of shoes started very young. My mother had rows upon rows of eighties-era stilettos in every color of the rainbow, which she would take off at the end of a long day and carelessly sling into her closet. At the end of the week, she would pay me a few dollars to swoop in and arrange them. I never minded this chore in the least. Instead, I would peek inside each one, observing their exotic-sounding labels and locales of origin.

For many people, shoes are a necessity, an item of practicality. Shoes are what they slip on to protect their feet from the outside elements. If I shared this sentiment, I'd surely save a lot of money. Instead, I view shoes as wearable art. The bookshelf in my office has recently been stripped of reading materials and instead repopulated with my shoe collection. This might seem extreme, but I believe that shoes are an opportunity to enhance an otherwise ordinary outfit. When shoe shopping, I am drawn to styles that resemble avant-garde skyscrapers. Patent, platforms, wedges to the extreme – these are a few of my favorite things.



Bloette Gala Darling is a self-described international playgirl and dresses the part. She shares my rabid love of big hair and big shoes, understands the importance of coordinating colors, and is not afraid of fuchsia pink.

G

GALA DARLING says...

It took me a while to really learn to appreciate shoes. Growing up, I never understood the stacks of boxes, Polaroids taped on the front, that dominated my mother's wardrobe. During my teenage goth years, New Rock combat boots were my best friend. Stomping around until the metal heels wore down, I loved to pair them with striped stockings and couldn't comprehend wanting to wear anything else.

I don't know whether it was my newfound obsession with fashion magazines, dissatisfaction with my height (a measly five foot seven, a far cry from the five foot ten boasted by my mother), or if it was just instinct kicking in, but all of a sudden, shoes became something I thought about constantly. It has been a violent, ongoing love affair ever since.

GALA D



ZOETICA EBB

says...

I'm thoroughly convinced that shoe love is hereditary. Like Nubby, I got mine from my hyper-chic mother, whose closets are always stacked high with multi-colored boxes. I still remember the smell of cardboard and leather that would envelop the six-year-old me during wardrobe-probing expeditions. I wondered how she kept track of all those shoes, tucked away with their spiked heels at ease and buckles dormant, some of them not seeing the light of day for months, years.

Now older and with a growing shoe reserve of my own, I understand: she didn't. Currently, I'm all about relinquishing control and allowing my gear to make the final call. I close my eyes when reaching into my titanic closet—it's like a Magic 8-Ball foretelling my fashion future, with flats, heels, and boots to guide me toward the rest of the day's ensemble. I know my footwear by touch because I have to. My battle cry is "Oh, yes, it is entirely possible to construct an outfit around a pair of shoes, and don't let anyone tell you otherwise!" That, and "Big shoes por vida!" Thanks, Mom.

Dear Coilhouse,

So, this snobby salesgirl at this shoe store was like, "your feet are too big for this shoe," because I'm a size 11. And I was like, "um...so what?! go in the back and find my size, betch!!!" The song, "Shoes," just kind of tells that story.

So, yes, I'm obsessed with shoes. So what? I don't think that's weird. And if it is weird, that's kind of great. Weird is better than everything being the same.

♥ K

COILHOUSE

KELLY

says...



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THIS NUMBER CONTAINS

The Picture of Dorian Gray

A SEMPITERNAL SARTORIAL EDITORIAL

2010, COILHOUSE EDITION

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INSPIRED BY (AND INDEBTED TO)
OSCAR WILDE

"THE SOUL IS A TERRIBLE REALITY.
IT CAN BE BOUGHT AND SOLD, AND BARTERED AWAY.
IT CAN BE POISONED, OR MADE PERFECT. THERE IS A SOUL IN EACH ONE OF US. I KNOW IT."

LONDON
NEW YORK CITY • LOS ANGELES • SAN FRANCISCO • NEW ZEALAND





*I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful.
The most precious of my life. And it had
reverted to him his own body, as it would
revert to him his own soul.*



*Now sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and
I would give my soul for that!*
*It will never be older than this particular day,
were only the other way!*

If it were only the other way!

*If it were, I would
to grow old. For the*

ways like to know every



*It is the world's original sin.
low to laugh, History would have been different.*

*The quick, and soft, and light, showed him the lines of anxiety round the mouth as clearly as if
he had been looking into a mirror after he had done some dreadful thing.*

*The picture that was
everything!*

*Nothing about my old ones
nothing in the whole world. I would not give! I
would give my soul for that!*

For the sake of the whole world I would not give!





Those who are faithful know only the trivial sides of love, it is the faithless who know love is tragedy.

All art is at once surface and symbol.
All art is at once surface and symbol.
All art is at once surface and symbol.

They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty.

I always like to know everything about my new friends, and nothing about my old ones.

People are very fond of giving away what they need most themselves.

It is not the priest, that gives us absolution.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

For there there is life.
There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

I know what convenience is, to begin with. It is not what you told me it was. It is the divinest thing in us. Don't mess at it... I want to be good. I can't bear the idea of my not being hideous.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.



THE
LAST DAYS OF

GADJO DISKO

Words and pictures: Angeliska Polacheck

Gadjo Disko was a notorious dance party that first took place at the Rhizome Collective in Austin, Texas in April 2008. Over the next two years, we continued to throw an ecstatic soiree nearly every other month, attracting thousands of sweaty and sparkling lovelies. At the final bash this past February, we bid farewell to our beloved, costumed cavalcade of devoted Diskovites. Somehow, our false eyelashes stayed adhered despite our tears!

The boogie was born from the restless minds of four storm-tossed former New Orleanians who found ourselves part of the growing diaspora in Austin after Hurricane Katrina. Mack Henson, Chesley Allen, Sarah King, and I had all put on extravagant events in New Orleans inspired by the Dada Balls of yore: NOLA's Cabaret Revoltaire was a balls-out, full-contact, total-participation party that combined art, dance, and performance without the restrictions of a passive audience. After the vagaries of the storm, we decided to pare it down: "Let's just do a simple dance party." Little did we know what a behemoth our baby would become.

Additional photos: Chip Warren, Ed Lehmann,
Colin McIntyre and Wendy Corn

"people came to
GET DOWN"



Our Otesánek grew and grew until it encompassed and surpassed the boundaries of age, gender, ethnic background, and cultural milieu. I'm not sure where else you might see 66-year-old grannies (our amazing friend Beth, who danced at every single disko) getting down on the dance floor next to delectable trannies. How rare it is to find a party that transcends any one scene, where burners, hipsters, nerds, punks, queers, goths, and all the beautiful and (thankfully) unclassifiable freaks can get together without a trace of pretension or scorn.

Given that the night's maxim was "Dress to Transgress," you might have expected to encounter that old up-and-down stare or to run a gauntlet of fancy club creatures too dolled up to dance for fear of smearing their macquillage. Not so at Gadjo Disko, where surgical adhesive was the only way to keep your jewels stuck on your cheekbones though the swelter of Texas August in a club with a busted AC. Truly, I'd never seen so many giant grins displayed unabashedly. It's incredible what a night spent dancing one's ass off can do for the soul.

We were often asked for tips on what to wear to Gadjo Disko, or whether there was any unifying theme. The truth is it was a total apocalyptic-ethno-glam-nouveau-coquette free-for-all. Attendees had very different versions of transgressive dressing. We could always expect lots of sequins, tulle, jewels, glitter, moustaches, bare breasts (and whatnot), leather, and feathers.

The disko was the closest thing Austin had to true Mardi Gras – not the Bourbon St. tourist version but the authentic, transformative bacchanalia, and with it, the freedom that mummung brings.

The name was a tongue-in-cheek play on the title of Tony Gatlif's film about the Roma near Bucharest, Gadjo Dilo, which means "crazy stranger" or non-gypsy. It was only appropriate; the vast majority of our audience was bound to not be of Romani descent but was still appreciative of Rom performers like Taraf de Haïdouks, Fanfare Ciocărlia, Esma Redžepova, and Kocani Orkestar.

Celebrating other cultures through the music we played always was hugely important. Without succumbing to a crap "world music" label, we managed to turn people on to some crazy sounds from all over the place: Brazilian baile funk, kurduro from Africa, Cambodian rap and Slavic hip-hop as well as loads of Balkan beats. Some quintessential Gadjo Disko favorites include Azis (a transvestite Bulgarian Romani chalgá singer, politician, and talk show host), Verka Serduchka, and Boney M (Rah-Rah-Rasputin!). DJ Chicken Kiev (a.k.a. Chesley) continually scoured the most obscure corners of the globe to bring us his signature blend of 100% recycled culture, straight from Gadjodiskostan.

People came to get down. Picture a sea of eclectic, euphoric lovelies, all simultaneously entering into the trance state that serious dancing will take you to. The party became a powerful aphrodisiac, as evidenced by the numerous Craigslist missed connections ads that invariably sprang up overnight. That disko voodoo love magic was the catalyst for countless love affairs, and at least one baby.

Special extravaganzas were thrown for Halloween (Disco de los Muertos) and DIY fashion shows (Glamour and Sickle). A wealth of performers opened up our nights, from Mongolian burlesque (Franziska) to New Orleans Sissy Bounce (Big Freedra). Various acts both international and local all graced our stages: Winovino, Golem, Sangre de Sol, Buscando el Monte, Rebecca Havemeyer + Christeene, Minor Mishap Marching Band, DJ Nohmaada, Mistress Stephanie and Her Melodic Cat, The Invincible Czars, Faith Delphi, MC Subzero Permafrost, ¡Mariachis del Muerte!, DJ Brânza, Baruzuland Shadow Theatre, Leila Bela, Brass Ovaries, Little Stolen Moments, Dominique Vyborny, and Agent Red to name a few.

We were constantly amazed by the inventiveness, warmth, and originality of our fellow participants. In a recent interview with The Onion's A.V. Club, Mack elaborated on some of the most satisfying aspects of doing the Disko: "This is music that nobody [here] has ever heard before, and the fashion style and even the party style – nobody had seen anything quite like that in Austin, or anywhere as far as I know. Watching that community come together and feed off each other energetically and create this new sort of style was amazingly rewarding. Also, without sounding like a hippie, 'the vibe.' Austin tends to be a little uptight sometimes in its party style. You know, everybody's a little too cool to clap for the band. To see them get loose and shake it – like, 'ass shaking in the streets' New Orleans style – was something we tried to promote. I mean, for the first one, by way of trying to get the idea across, we offered free admission for anybody who would do a wine enema on the dance floor. That's something you see out in New Orleans. These kids will be up on the pool table with their ankles in the air, and somebody shoving a wine bag up their ass. Obviously, you get trashed really quickly – and once you've been shoving wine up your ass on the pool table, you know what kind of night it's going to be. There's no going back; there's no middle ground. We actively promoted that good-humored, debauched kind of fun, and discouraged the hipster attitude. It was definitely hands-on, booty-out partying. It was super rewarding."

At the final Gadjo Disko, hordes of sparkly attendees waited in lines down the street for blocks. We were floored and humbled, and grateful. Keep your fingers crossed that the planets will align just right at some point in the future for a resurrection. There's just no way we can say goodbye to Gadjodiskostan forever.

"It's incredible what a night spent
DANCING one's ass off
can do for the SOUL."



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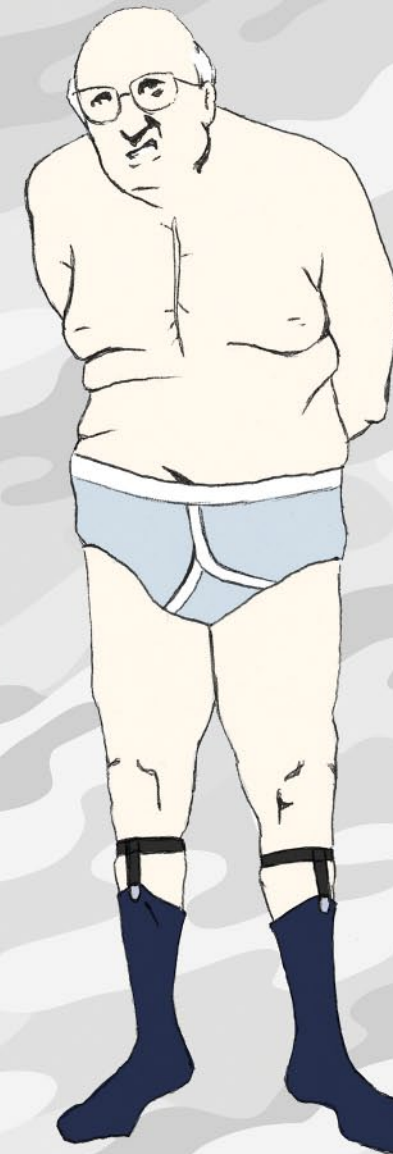
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From the desk of designer Mildred Von Hildegard, a sneak peek at the new face of fashion house Mother of London's much-anticipated upcoming collection. What better model for the label's vision of high-tech aristocracy than the Prince of Darkness, bionic haute Halliburtonite with a penchant for hoods, duct tape, puppetry, Armageddon, undisclosed secret locations and the trappings of the Galactic Empire? When asked what more can be expected the forthcoming collaboration, Von Hildegard stated enigmatically, "my belief is that we will be greeted as liberators."

ILLUSTRATIONS Mildred Von Hildegard
INTRODUCTION Nadya Lev



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